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THE LENS OF THE NOBEL PRIZE: MODELS OF  
RECEPTION AND CULTURAL POLITICS

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# Representation of Chinese and Indian Literature in World Literature Through the Lens of the Nobel Prize: Models of Reception and Cultural Politics

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## **Abstract:**

In today's era of globalization, international prizes are one of the ways to validate and recognize national strength in terms of the cultural capital of nations. English is the *lingua franca* of the world in modern times and also the central language of world literature. India and China are among the oldest civilizations having multi-lingual and multi-ethnic societies and have produced a plethora of literary texts since ancient times. Joining the global stage as nation-states in post-colonial times, both nations have gone through various socio-economic and cultural changes. With the advent of globalization and rise in their economic and regional importance, both countries are now ready to find their place in the world republic of letters.

The Nobel Prize in Literature is the most prestigious award in the field of literature. Drawing upon the prestige of the prize economy, this paper examines the pulls and pressure between the center and periphery of this world republic of letters by looking through the prism of the Nobel Prize. In the case of India and China, the Nobel Prize in Literature has been only awarded to Rabindranath Tagore (1913) and Mo Yan (2012). Gao Xingjian (2000), who was born in China but later became a French citizen, and V.S. Naipaul (2001), who was born in Trinidad and Tobago but has ancestral links to India, have both won the Nobel Prize, but neither have received similar attention in China and India respectively. Other writers in consideration for this paper are Rudyard

Kipling (1907) and Pearl S. Buck (1938), both with strong ties to the two countries but not ethnically Chinese or Indian. Kipling was born in British India, educated in Britain, worked in India and has written about India. Similarly, Pearl S. Buck grew up in China and wrote extensively about China. This paper studies various nominations, winners and controversies related to the Nobel Prize in Literature from both countries. It attempts to locate, compare and converge Indian and Chinese literature in the context of world literature. The method used in this study is primarily analytical and explanatory and provides a detailed account of the exposure to and experience of Indian and Chinese literature on the global stage in the twenty-first century.

**Key words:** *Nobel Prize, world literature, Indian literature, Chinese literature*

## I. Introduction: Indian and Chinese Literature

Both the Indian and Chinese civilizations are some of the oldest civilizations in the world. And during their long histories, both have produced and disseminated an enormous body of literature. Both India and China had a rich heritage of literary forms in its classical literatures written in traditional Chinese, Tamil, Sanskrit, and other indigenous languages. In modern times, use of vernacular language came into the Indian and Chinese literary space, but these literary works were constantly ignored by the new writers of the world—European/American in colonial and post-colonial times.

To understand Chinese and Indian literature, we need to discuss history, languages and the establishment of China and India as political entities in the form of nation-states. Nation-state is a contested term and to define it is neither simple nor can it be done in isolation. However, for the purpose of this paper, I discuss Indian and Chinese literature in terms of the: (a) geographical

praxis, (b) linguistic terms and (c) cultural connections of these two sovereign and modern nation-states.

China was established as the People's Republic of China in 1949 and India became independent as the Republic of India in 1947. Can we call literature written during this particular geographical formulation of nation-states as Chinese and Indian literature? My answer would be "no". If we only consider literary texts which are produced in a geographical and sovereign entity as the literature of that region, we might mistakenly ignore literatures written by diaspora communities living in other parts of the world, such as those written in Chinese American, Malaysian Chinese or British-Indian and Australian-Indian communities. To counter these kinds of formulated concepts, an effort was made by Shu-Mei Shih (UCLA) to construct the concept of "Sinophone Literature". Shih noted that "by 'Sinophone Literature' I mean literature written in Chinese by Chinese-speaking writers in various parts of the world outside China, as distinguished from 'Chinese literature'—literature from China"<sup>1</sup>. This concept gives us a view to bridge the gap created by national boundaries, but it misses the literature written in other Chinese or ethnic languages, such as Cantonese, Uyghur, Tibetan, Mongolian or even in English by a Chinese author about China. India, on the other hand, gained independence from the British in 1947. The State Reorganization Act was passed in 1956 and India was divided into 14 states and seven Union territories on the basis of regional languages. Currently, in India, there is no national language but there are 22 official languages. India is a multi-lingual country, and, in my view, any literature written in not only these 22 official languages but also any other Indian language is part of Indian literature. In this context, we are still overlooking one angle in the formulation of Indian and Chinese literature—literature written by people who are not Indian or Chinese by birth or

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<sup>1</sup> Shu-Mei Shih, *The Concept of the Sinophone*, the Modern Language Association of America, 2011, p 29.

nationality but grew up in India or China and wrote about Indian and Chinese society extensively, such as R. Kipling, P. S. Buck or V. S. Naipaul.

In view of these issues, this paper tries to answer the following questions:

1. How do we locate Indian literature or Chinese literature within world literature?
2. How do we compare Indian and Chinese literature and where does it converge in the context of world literature?

To answer these questions, this paper examines the Nobel Prize in Literature, especially its selection procedures and the winners of the Prize discussed above as relevant to India and China. It is important to discuss the Nobel Prize in Literature because it not only provides a window to explore literature, but also gives us a method to understand the politics of literature.

The Nobel Prize in Literature is a “cultural practice” in its atypical form since inception and further in its practice. The key function of this prize is to award people who “have conferred the greatest benefit to humankind”, and to facilitate “cultural transactions” on a global level. This stage of cultural transaction facilitates countless agents of culture with different resources and benefits to participate in value production. In James F. English’s words:

Cultural value cannot emerge in the absence of social debts and obligations, of the (very unequally distributed) credit or respect that certain individuals are granted by others; its production is always a social process. Neither can it emerge in a political vacuum, the participants uncolored by and indifferent to prevailing hierarchies of class, race, gender, or nation; its production is always politicized. And neither can it emerge in perfect independence of or opposite to the economic marketplace itself.<sup>2</sup>

### III. The Nobel Prize

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<sup>2</sup> James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*, Harvard University Press, MA, 2008, p 27

Alfred Nobel (1833-1896) was the inventor of dynamite and proprietor of 355 patents. He established the first international holding company in the world—the Nobel Dynamite Trust Company. He died in 1896, and left a will that stated:

...All of my remaining realizable assets are to be disbursed as follows: the capital, converted to safe securities by my executors, is to constitute a fund, the interest on which is to be **distributed annually as prizes to those who, during the preceding year, have conferred the greatest benefit to humankind.** The interest is to be divided into five equal parts and distributed as follows: . . . one part to the person who, in the field of literature, **produced the most outstanding work in an idealistic direction;** and one part to...; **that for literature by the Academy in Stockholm...** It is my express wish that when awarding the prizes, **no consideration be given to nationality, but that the prize be awarded to the worthiest person, whether or not they are Scandinavian...**

(Nobel, Paris, 27 November 1895, trans. Jeffrey Ganelen 2018)<sup>3</sup> [Emphasis Added]

Drawing from Nobel's will, the Nobel Prize was instituted and finally awarded for the first time in 1901. According to the will, Nobel's remaining assets after distributing among people he mentioned in his will, was to be divided into five parts with one awarded to "the person who, in the field of literature, produced the most outstanding work in an idealistic direction"<sup>4</sup>. The "Swedish Academy"<sup>5</sup> was given the authority by Alfred Nobel himself to select the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. The Nobel Prize is in the hands of 18 judges who are members of the

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<sup>3</sup> Full text of Alfred Nobel's will. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2020. Sat. 8 Aug 2020.

<<https://www.nobelprize.org/alfred-nobel/full-text-of-alfred-nobels-will-2/>>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The Swedish Academy was founded in 1786 by King Gustav III with a purpose to advance the Swedish language and literature. The founding ground of the Swedish Academy is paradoxical to the core of Nobel Prize in literature which is supposedly awarded without taking 'nationality' into consideration. The Academy has 18 permanent members who were elected for a life term and five of them constitute the Nobel Committee who selects candidates for the Nobel Prize. As it was instituted by the King, most of the earlier members of the academy were important officials rather than the writers or scholars who joined later in history.

Swedish Academy and collectively decide on the winner. What is the process of nomination? Is it in the domain of everyone to nominate? It does not appear so as the right to submit nominations for the award of a Nobel Prize in Literature is confined to the following groups of people:

1. Members of the Swedish Academy and of other academies, institutions and societies which are similar to it in construction and purpose;
2. Professors of literature and of linguistics at universities and university colleges;
3. Previous Nobel Laureates in Literature;
4. Presidents of those societies of authors that are representative of the literary production in their respective countries.<sup>6</sup>

The very first question that comes to mind is thus who can win a Nobel Prize in Literature? Those who are nominated will then pass through the initial scrutiny to make it to the *final list* of candidates. Thus, the very first stage is *nomination*. For 50 years, one of the rules of this process, which is not mentioned in Nobel's will, is to maintain secrecy over the nomination process. Moreover, information about discussions over different nominations and candidature is available only in Swedish and not publicly accessible online. Thus, only people who are fluent in Swedish and can travel to Sweden can access the full details. However, if the available data online on the Nobel Prize's website about nominations from 1901-1966 is closely analyzed, it clearly shows that people from non-European or American cultural backgrounds and who do not write in one of the colonial languages, are continuously ignored. However, in the last 20 years, the Academy is trying to take a more inclusive approach. More information could be revealed once the data of nominations and discussions over the candidates is made public with translations in different languages.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nobelprize.org/nomination/literature/>

Following is the data currently available on the Nobel Prize website about the nominations from India and China (1901-1966):

Table 1.1: Nominations from India (1901-1966)

Name of the Nominee	Year	Nominator
Rabindranath Tagore	1913	Thomas Moore
Roby Dutta	1916,16	Raya Yatindranath + Mano Ganguly
Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan	1933,34,35,36,37,52,57	Knut H.L. Hammarskjold (5), The PEN Bombay, Arthur Arberry
Hari Mohan Banerjee	1936	Devdutta Bhandarkar
Bensadhar Majumdar	1937,39	Satyendranath Sen, Mukundadeb Chatterjee
Sanjib Chaudhri	1938,39	Mahmoud Hassan, K R Danungo
Sri Aurobindo	1943	Francis Younghusband

Table 1.2: Nominations from China (1901-1966)

Name of the Nominee	Year	Nominator
Lin Yuntang	1940,50	Sven Hedin (member of Swedish Academy) + P. S. Buck, P. S. Buck
Hu Shih	1939,57	Sven Hedin (member of Swedish Academy) The PEN, HK

Table 1.1 and Table 1.2 show the number of nominations from India and China. The total number of nominations in literature from 1901-1966 is 3,104, and among those 3,104 nominations, only seven Indians were nominated 16 times and only four Chinese have been nominated six times so far.

According to the official reports of the Nobel Prize nomination, from 1901-1966, only two Chinese writers were able to make it to the nomination process, namely Hu Shih (twice in 1939 and 1957) and Lin Yuntang (twice in 1940 and 1950). However, both failed to draw the attention



of the Nobel Committee. There are possibly various reasons for this omission such as: political non-affinity, Eurocentrism, language barrier, etc. The Swedish Academy works under democratic set up and thus its affinity has been reflected in awarding the Nobel Prize. Most of the writers awarded belong to democratic countries or who prefer democracy in their country's political system. Looking at the quantitative representation of countries, it is simple evident that European writers are preferred over writers from other part of the World. Here, language barrier is another factor which could be a possible reason for omission of writers writing in not-so-popular language in comparison to dominant languages, such as French, English and German. The greatest modern Chinese writers, such as Lu Xun (1881–1936), Lao She (1899–1966), Shen Congwen (1902–1988) and Ba Jin (1904–2005) missed out too. Sven Hedin, member of the Swedish Academy, during his China visit in 1927 allegedly suggested that Prof. Liu Bannong of Peking University had asked him to nominate Lu Xun. Lu Xun's reaction is quoted below:

“Concerning the Nobel riches, Liang Qichao isn't suitable, and neither am I. There's still hard work to be done before this money can be won. There are so many writers in the world better than I, yet they are unable to win. Think about *Little John*, which I translated; how could I, rather than this writer, win? What gives me an unfair advantage is the fact that I am Chinese and helped by the word “China” . . . it would be laughable. I feel China doesn't yet have anyone who can win the Nobel Prize, in fact, and Sweden had best take no notice of us, best not give it to anyone [of us]. If the yellow-skinned people were given preferential consideration, it would only encourage the egotism of the Chinese, convincing them they really were equal to the great foreign writers. The result would be terrible. Everything before me is still black, there's fatigue and dejection; I don't know how much more I can write. If I won this thing and stopped writing, I would be doing people a disservice; if I continued writing [after winning], perhaps it would just be Hanlin literature, totally worthless. Carrying on as of old, obscure and impoverished, is the best way”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lu Xun, “Zhi Tai Jingnong” (To Tai Jingnong), in *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 11, 580–581. See also the discussion of Lu Xun's international stature and Nobel candidacy in Paul B. Foster, “The Ironic Inflation of Chinese National Character: Lu Xun's International Reputation, Romain Rolland's Critique of ‘The True Story of Ah Q,’ and the Nobel Prize,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 13.1 (Spring 2001): 140–168.

The Nobel Prize in Literature cannot be awarded posthumously. Shen Congwen missed the award in 1986 because he died before the prize was announced. In 2000, Gao Xingjian was awarded the Nobel Prize and became the first writer to win who writes in Chinese, but his prize was denounced by the Chinese authorities. After 112 years of waiting, finally in 2012 a Chinese author, Mo Yan won the prize and was cheered on by the Chinese state.

Let us look at a few below tabled listings of award prepared on the basis of language, politics and gender to understand the process of awarding the Nobel Prize. The following table represents the winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature according to their language of writing, or their mother tongue.

Table 1.3: Winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature on the basis of language

Winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature (1901-2019)	
English	29
French	15
German	14
Spanish	11
Swedish	7
Italian	6
Russian	6
Polish	5
Norwegian	3
Danish	3
Chinese	2

Greek	2
Japanese	2
Arabic	1
Bengali	1
Czech	1
Finnish	1
Hebrew	1
Hungarian	1
Icelandic	1
Occitan	1
Portuguese	1
Serbo-Croatian	1
Turkish	1
Yiddish	1

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the United Nations was formed as an international organization to mediate between nation-states. The second half of the twentieth century in the post-WWII era centered on the Cold War relations and contest between the USA and the USSR. Norway and Sweden are the countries that decide the Nobel Prize winners. Democracy and individualism are the prevailing political ideologies of most of the European nations including Sweden.<sup>8</sup> The other most prevailing political ideology, and in opposition to “democracy” in some parts of the world, were communism and Marxism.

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<sup>8</sup> Costel Calin, *Hawks versus Doves: The Influence of Political Ideology on the Foreign Policy Behaviours of Democratic States*, PhD Dissertation, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, p 79.

Table 1.4: Residence country of the winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature

Country of residence	Number of winners
France	16
USA	12
Britain	10
Germany	8
Sweden	7
Spain	5
Poland	5
Italy	4
Norway	3
Japan	3
Denmark	3
Soviet Union	3
Switzerland	2
Ireland	2
South Africa	2
Chile	2
Greece	2
Finland Greece	1
Yugoslavia	1
Iceland	1
Israel	1
Belgium	1
Guatemala	1
Australia	1
Colombia	1

Czechoslovakia	1
Egypt	1
Mexico	1
India	1
Saint Lucia	1
Austria	1
Portugal	1
Hungary	1
Turkey	1
China	1

This statistical data about who was nominated from India and China, as well as the demographics of the winners (who are potential nominators) that has been pointed out in above tables shows that writers from India and China were a marginal group in this process of nomination itself. Why is this the case – is it really that they were ignored (and if so, how?), or was there a lack of recognition of these works, especially if there were few nominators familiar with diverse writers? It seems that the way the selection process was set up kept the award and community rather insular.

It has been revealed that writers writing in influential languages of the World, such as English, French, German, and Spanish are awarded more than those writing in less popular languages. Additionally, due to the dominant and accepted ideology of democracy in Sweden, writers from democratic countries such as France, Germany, the USA and the UK have been awarded the prize in comparison to countries with communism as dominant ideology, such as Russia, Cuba and China. Thus, it can be concluded that language and political ideology of the country and writer were contributing factors apart from the artistic and aesthetic presentation of their works.

Another major issue to be noted is the representation of gender in the nomination process and awarding of the prize. Only 12% of the total recipients in the history of the Nobel Prize in Literature are female.

Table 1.5: Gender distribution among the Nobel Prize winners

Gender	Nominated (1901-1965) <sup>9</sup>	Winner (1901-2019)	Nominated (1901-1966) From India	Nominated (1901-1966) From China	Winner (1901-2019) From India	Winner (1901-2019) From China
Male	2802	111	7 (16 times)	2 (4 times)	1	1 <sup>10</sup>
Female	285	15	0	0	0	0

#### IV. Indian Literature and Chinese Literature in a Global Context: Comparison and Convergence

I am studying three groups of two authors who have been awarded the Nobel Prize and have temporal commonality in terms of a geographically defined China and India, linguistic similarities and cultural connections. The first group consists of Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore and Chinese novelist Mo Yan. The second group includes China-born French citizen Gao Xingjian and Trinidadian writer of Indian descent Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul. The third group comprises of British-India born British writer Rudyard Kipling and American writer Pearl S. Buck who grew up in China.

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<sup>9</sup> According to the rule of the Nobel Prize, details of nominations can only be disclosed after 50 years after the award.

<sup>10</sup> Gao Xingjian and Mo Yan both were awarded the Nobel Prize. However, Gao Xingjian became citizen of France before he was awarded. More details about the biography of Gao Xingjian and Mo Yan can be accessed from the official website of the Nobel Prize: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2000/gao/biographical/> and <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2012/yan/facts/>

## 1. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Mo Yan (b. 1955)

It is almost impossible to compare Rabindranath Tagore with Mo Yan, however, I am trying to conceive this comparison only within the scope of this paper in terms of representation of Indian and Chinese literature in the world republic of letters.

Rabindranath Tagore was born in 1861 in British India. He never graduated from formal schooling, but he was a poly-math—poet, writer, philosopher, composer and painter. He originally wrote mostly in Bengali. He was a successful writer of all literary genres including drama, songs, essays, stories, travel diaries, autobiographies, etc., but first of all he was a poet. His most famous works are *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings), *Gora* (Fair-faced), *Ghare-Baire* (The Home and the World). Rabindranath Tagore became the first Asian to be awarded the Nobel Prize in 1913 “because of his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse, by which, with consummate skill, he has made his poetic thought, expressed in his own English words, a part of the literature of the West”<sup>11</sup>. His songs were chosen as the national anthem of two countries, India (Jana-Gana-Mana) and Bangladesh (Amar Sonar Bangla). The national anthem of Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka Matha) was also inspired by his writings and written by his student Ananda Samarakoon. In terms of reception, Tagore received worldwide praise for his works and philosophical thoughts. The anniversary of his birth, “Kabipranam,” is celebrated every year across the globe. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen regarded Tagore as a “towering figure”, a “deeply relevant and many-sided contemporary thinker”<sup>12</sup>. Tagore was renowned throughout much of Europe, North America and East Asia. He influenced figures such as Japanese Nobel laureate Yasunari Kawabata, French Nobel laureate

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<sup>11</sup> The Nobel Prize in Literature 1913. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2020. Tue. 29 Sep 2020.  
<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1913/summary/>

<sup>12</sup> Amartya Sen in his article on *Tagore and his India* written for the Nobel Prize website. Full article can be accessed at <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1913/tagore/article/>

Andre Gide, Russian poet Anna Akhmatova, Turkish former Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, Czech Indologist Vincenc Lesny, Vietnamese writer Nguyen An Ninh, Chilean writers Pablo Neruda and Gabriel Mistral, Mexican writer Octavia Paz, and Spanish writers Jose Ortega Gasset and Juan Ramon Jimenez. Tagore's works have been widely translated into almost every major languages of the world, including English, Dutch, German, Spanish, etc.

Mo Yan (penname of Guan Moye) was born to a peasant family in Shandong Province in China. He dropped out of school at the age of 11 at the start of Mao's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). However, not only Mo Yan but Gao Xingjian was also a drop out of school during the Cultural Revolution. Mo Yan's first novel was published in 1981 and over a period of time he started creating works in multiple literary genres, such as short stories, novels and essays. The hallmark of Mo Yan's writing is that he combines written literary style with popular oral traditions to address contemporary social issues. The Nobel Prize in Literature 2012 was awarded to Mo Yan "who with hallucinatory realism merges folk tales, history and the contemporary"<sup>13</sup>. In terms of reception, he received worldwide recognition first through Zhang Yimou's film *Red Sorghum*, based on his novel of the same name *Red Sorghum Clan* (1986) which was awarded the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 1987. As his works were being translated into French and English, he probably gained more attention in the West than within China. Some scholars believe that the translator of Mo Yan's works, Howard Goldblatt, was the major reason that Mo Yan's work was brought into the international limelight. With the publication of *Red Sorghum* in English in 1993, he became one of a handful of Chinese writers who gained a worldwide readership. Mo Yan's writing often uses older Chinese literature and popular oral traditions as a starting point,

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<sup>13</sup> The Nobel Prize in Literature 2012. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2020. Wed. 30 Sep 2020. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2012/summary/>



combining these with contemporary social issues. He has written 11 novels, 30 novellas, and more than 100 short-stories, plays and prose collections. His works have been translated into more than 52 languages to date. The decision to award Mo Yan stirred a heated discussion at global platform. Intellectuals, Celebrity authors, and political commentators from within and outside China were separated in their opinions. Some celebrated Mo Yan's award and congratulated him, while some observed this as a mistake. Academicians, such as Michel Hockx (professor of Chinese at SOAS), Howard Goldblatt (Retired professor and translator of Mo Yan), Sabina Knight (professor of Chinese at Smith College), Charles Laughlin (professor of Chinese at University of Virginia), etc. welcomed the Swedish Academy choice. On the other side, Perry Link (Professor Emeritus of East Asian Studies at Princeton University), Anna Sun (Faculty of Sociology and Asian Studies at Kenyon College), etc. questioned Mo Yan's political stance and language ability. Nobel Laureate Herta Muller and celebrated author Salman Rushdie also criticized Mo Yan's political stance. Eric Brahmansen, a Beijing-based translator of modern Chinese fiction, stated that, "it is clear that Mo Yan engages in the complex calculus of what is and isn't permissible that faces every Chinese writer. There is nothing wrong with that, not every artist has the stomach for strident dissent and, having been banned in the past, Mo Yan has nothing to prove." However, it is still very early to analyze and come to a conclusion on the reception of Mo Yan's works.

## **2. Gao Xingjian (b. 1940) and V. S. Naipaul (1932-2018)**

According to Encyclopedia Britannica and the Nobel Prize website, Gao Xingjian is a Chinese émigré novelist, playwright, translator, dramatist, director, critic and artist. He was born in Guangzhou, China but left China in 1987 and settled down as a political refugee in France. He was sent to a re-education camp during the Cultural Revolution. He made his theatrical debut with *Signal d'alarme* (*Signal Alarm*) in 1982. His *absurd* drama *Bus Stop*, which established his

reputation, was condemned during the campaign against “intellectual pollution” (described by one eminent member of the Party as the most pernicious piece of writing since the foundation of the People’s Republic)<sup>14</sup>. His play *Taowang* (Fugitives) was set around the brutality of the 1989 Tiananmen Square suppression of student demonstrations. Its publication angered the Chinese authorities, who banned Gao’s works and declared him persona non grata.<sup>15</sup> Gao asserted that he does not write either for politics or for money. In his collection of essays, *Meiyou zhuyi* (“No-ism”), he explains the basis of his stance as—what he is and, what he is not— “no-ism”. “No-ism approves of individual choice, but it doesn’t view the individual as a supreme being . . . it’s best to stand on the side-lines and not harbor wild dreams of dominating the world.”<sup>16</sup> Apart from *no-ism*, Gao advocates *leng de wenxue* (“cold literature”), in which the writer is neither a hero, a revolutionary nor a sacrificial object, and has no moral responsibility to his readers nor duty owed to society.<sup>17</sup> On the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2000, Chinese writer Gao Xingjian was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature “for an oeuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama”<sup>18</sup>. When this news of Gao Xingjian’s win was announced, the Party’s official mouthpiece *Renmin ribao* commented: “It seems the Nobel Committee has used a political criterion for giving the prize for literature, instead of doing so from the perspective of literary value. . . This shows that the Nobel Prize for Literature has essentially been used for political purposes and thus has lost its authority”<sup>19</sup>. This news was followed by an immediate ban on the publishing of Gao Xingjian’s works. Mainland literati were asked not to comment on it. However, Gao was embraced by Taiwanese leaders, intellectuals and

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2000/gao/biographical/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gao-Xingjian>

<sup>16</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Meiyou zhuyi* (No-ism), Cosmos Books, Hong Kong, 1996, p2.

<sup>17</sup> Gao Xingjian, *Meiyou zhuyi* (No-ism), Cosmos Books, Hong Kong, 1996, p19.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2000/gao/facts/>

<sup>19</sup> Xinhua, “Nuobeier wenxuejiang bei yong yu zhengzhi mudi shiqu quanweixing”, *Renmin ribao*, 14 October 2000, p.2.

common people as their own representative of the Chinese on the world stage. President Chen Shuibian and Long Yingtai, director of the Taipei Cultural Bureau (political and cultural leaders) cheered on Gao's prize<sup>20</sup>. The global Chinese community followed this news with fierce debates. On the one hand, some expressed joy over a Chinese writer winning the Nobel Prize, on the other hand some were puzzled by Gao Xingjian's name. Prominent exiles such as Yang Lian enthusiastically endorsed Gao's prize, while in internet chat rooms commentators pondered whether Gao's Nobel Prize meant that good Chinese literature could only be produced abroad.<sup>21</sup> Yang proclaimed the award "the victory of exile" and reported how in 1993 he and Gao had both agreed that "the experience of exile was extremely necessary to writers who had grown up in the Mainland"<sup>22</sup>. Exiled democracy activists though resented that the Academy chose someone who propounded "cold literature". "It seems the Chinese Nobel Prize winner doesn't think it his responsibility to struggle for freedom for others."<sup>23</sup> Chen Pingyuan, a professor at Peking University, expressed jubilation that a Nobel Prize had gone to a work in Chinese; his place of origin and current residence were less important.<sup>24</sup> However, most of these comments were made in the political context, either for approval of the long awaited dream to end the "Nobel Complex" in China or discarding the prize in lieu of it being given to a Chinese dissident/exiled/banned writer. Very few people in Mainland China had read the works for which Gao was awarded the prize when the Nobel announcement was made.<sup>25</sup>

Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul was born to a family of Indian descent who had settled in Trinidad and Tobago. He was educated at University College, Oxford and later became a British

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<sup>20</sup> Julia Lovell, *The Politics of Cultural Capital*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2006, p172.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Yang Lian, "Liuwang de shengli", *Zhongguo shibao*, 14 October 2000, p 37.

<sup>23</sup> Moli, "Miandui Ruidian wenxue de 'jiezuo'", 25 February 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Chiensenet.2000. 14 October 2000.

<sup>25</sup> Julia Lovell, *The Politics of Cultural Capital*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 2006, p172.

citizen. He was awarded the 1971 Booker prize for his work *In a Free State*. He received Knighthood in 1990 and in 2001 he was awarded the Literature Nobel Prize “for having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories”<sup>26</sup>. In his early days, Naipaul saw India as *an area of darkness* and during his later age he saw India merely as *a wounded civilization*. In Naipaul words India is “a wretched country, full of pompous mediocrity, with no future. Look at Indian music. It is being influenced by Western music to an amusing extent. Indian painting and sculpture have ceased to exist—a dead country still running with the momentum of its heyday”.<sup>27</sup> Naipaul’s relationship with India in his writings and their ensuing reception is thorny and conflicted or criticized but never ignored, admired but attacked. Despite having a British passport, Naipaul was admired in India as “ours”. His writings are part of universities’ curricula there. In his lifetime, he was often compared to writers such as Conrad, Dickens and Tolstoy. He was also a “lightning rod for criticism, particularly by those who read his portrayals of third-world disarray as apologies for colonialism.” Chinua Achebe called him “a new purveyor of the old comforting myths” of the Eurocentric West. The celebrated poet Derek Walcott wrote in a poem “I see these islands and I feel to bawl, ‘Area of Darkness’ with V.S. Naipaul”. But the criticism did not end there. In India, Girish Karnad called him out at a talk, and wrote, “Mr. Naipaul has written three books on India. If you read them, you find that not even one of them contains any reference to music. He has gone through the whole of India without responding to Indian music. I think that only means that he is tone deaf”. His writings had started to stir the literary world.

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<sup>26</sup> V. S. Naipaul – Facts. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2020. Wed. 30 Sep 2020.

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2001/naipaul/facts/>

<sup>27</sup> Vivel Menezes, VS Naipaul and his conflicted relationship with India, *LiveMint*, 2018.

<https://www.livemint.com/Leisure/8kQpatxp2CADNvZIyaMMIP/VS-Naipaul-and-his-conflicted-relationship-with-India.html>

### 3. Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) and Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973)

Rudyard Kipling was a writer and poet born in Bombay, British-India, educated in Britain and worked as a journalist in India. In 1907, Kipling was the first English and still youngest writer to win the Nobel Prize in literature “in consideration of the power of observation, originality of imagination, virility of ideas and remarkable talent for narration which characterize the creations of this world-famous author”. Children in India during the 1990s like me grew up watching the TV series *Mowgli*, based on Kipling’s works *The Jungle Book* (1894). Charles Allen in his book *Kipling Sahib* wrote about Kipling’s relationship with India as the place where Rudyard Kipling was happiest, where he learned his craft, where he rediscovered himself through his writing and came of age as a Writer. India made him, charged his imagination, and after he left India in March 1889 at the age of twenty-three, he was most completely himself as an artist when re-inhabiting the two Indian worlds he had left behind. He lived thereafter on borrowed time, a state of higher creativity he was unable to maintain once he had exhausted his Indian memories with the writing of his masterwork *Kim*.

George Orwell saw Kipling as “a jingo imperialist”, who was “morally insensitive and aesthetically disgusting”. Literary critic Douglas Kerr wrote: “Kipling is still an author who can inspire passionate disagreement and his place in literary and cultural history is far from settled. But as the age of the European empires recedes, he is recognized as an incomparable, if controversial, interpreter of how empire was experienced. That, and an increasing recognition of his extraordinary narrative gifts, make him a force to be reckoned with”. In famous author T. S. Eliot’s words, Kipling has “an immense gift for using words, an amazing curiosity and power of observation with his mind and with all his senses, the mask of the entertainer, and beyond that a queer gift of second sight, of transmitting messages from elsewhere, a gift so disconcerting when

we are made aware of it that thenceforth we are never sure when it is *not* present: all this makes Kipling a writer impossible wholly to understand and quite impossible to belittle”<sup>28</sup>.

In 1892, Pearl Buck was born in West Virginia, USA. Her parents were working as missionaries in China. She grew up in Zhejiang, China and return back to the US to attend Randolph-Macon Woman’s College. After her graduation, she stayed in China until 1934. Her famous novel *The Good Earth* about Chinese culture was a bestseller in the US and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932. In 1938, she became the first American woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize in literature “for her rich and truly epic descriptions of peasant life in China and for her biographical masterpieces”<sup>29</sup>. Peter Conn, in his biography of Buck, argues that despite the accolades awarded to her, Buck’s contribution to literature has been mostly forgotten or deliberately ignored by America’s cultural gatekeepers. Kang Liao argues that Buck played a “pioneering role in demythologizing China and the Chinese people in the American mind”. Chinese writers who commented on Pearl Buck’s work include Lu Xun, Zhao Jiabi, Hu Feng, Ba Jin, and Lin Yutang (who was nominated by Buck for the Nobel Prize in 1945). “The reason why many people who write Chinese fiction fail,” Zhao Jiabi remarked, “and why Mrs. Buck’s *The Good Earth* can win world praise—even in China—is because the former only sketch the outside of Chinese people, while Mrs. Buck has got hold of a part of the Chinese soul”<sup>30</sup>. When Pearl Buck won the Nobel Prize, Chinese reactions expressed surprise and suspicion. Famous Chinese writer, Ba Jin was similarly unimpressed by her award: “I simply have no good feeling towards Pearl Buck. . .” Zou Zhenhuan wrote, “*The Good Earth* by American writer Pearl Buck won the Nobel Literature Prize. This meant that the treasury of Nobel Prize-winning works includes works

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<sup>28</sup> <https://tseliot.com/prose/rudyard-kipling>

<sup>29</sup> Pearl Buck – Facts. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB 2020. Tue. 29 Sep 2020.  
<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1938/buck/facts/>

<sup>30</sup> Zhao Jiabi, “Boke furen yu huang long” (Mrs Buck and the yellow dragon), in Guo, *Sai Zhenzhu*, 74.

containing Chinese subject matter, describing the fate of Chinese peasants and reflecting Chinese rural life”<sup>31</sup>. Other writers acknowledged that Buck’s portrayal of China went deeper than the average stereotypes produced by Westerners.

## V. Conclusion

Drawing from the above discussion, Indian literature and Chinese literature are very similar in the case of its reception in the world and inside China and India. Tagore and Mo Yan’s Nobel Prizes are viewed with national pride in both countries and it made them “national heroes” and representatives of their nations. The case of Gao Xingjian and V.S. Naipaul are also similar that even though they are writing about China and India, they are not considered as the representative writers of these nations because they are not politically in tandem with the prevailing concept of nationalism in their respective countries. Although P. S. Buck and Kipling were writing about China and India respectively, they are seen as foreigners and not incorporated into the Chinese and Indian literary canon. On the basis of this information, it can be concluded that it is cultural politics which is deciding the formation of Chinese and Indian literature, not the literature itself.

The emergent field of China and India studies approaches the study of Asia in an integrated fashion, allowing scholars to exceed limits imposed by national boundaries. Engaging recent debates over world literature, global cinema, transnational history, the history and future of area studies programs, and cross-cultural anthropology, this paper is engaged in China and India studies by examining connections and convergences between the two nations and thus putting them in conversation with each other.

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<sup>31</sup> Zou Zhenhuan, “Sai Zhenzhu *Dadi* de fanyi jiqi yinqi de zhengyi” (Debates surrounding the translation of Pearl Buck’s *The Good Earth*), in Guo, *Sai Zhenzhu*, 558.

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