



Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*China's Rise as a Norm
Builder and Challenges to
the Idea of Democracy*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker:

Nishit Kumar

10 September 2025

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Speaker: Dr. Nishit Kumar, Independent Researcher.

Chair: Prof. Sabaree Mitra, Professor, Centre for Chinese and Southeast Asian Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University; and Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi.

Venue: Zoom Webinar

- The seminar explored Mo Yan's novella *Biàn* 《变》 (Change), and its translations from Chinese into English and Hindi. The Chair, Prof. Sabaree Mitra, emphasised the importance of studying Chinese literature in India, noting Mo Yan's Nobel Prize as a milestone for Asian representation in the global literary canon. She asked whether writers like Mo Yan represent a case of the "periphery moving toward the centre" — non-Western literature being recognised globally — or whether such recognition is used for political and national prestige.
- Dr. Nishit Kumar contextualised Mo Yan's place in Chinese literature, tracing his rise from earlier works like *Honggaoliang* (Red Sorghum) to subsequent global recognition facilitated by Howard Goldblatt's translations.
- Employing Gideon Toury's framework of Descriptive Translation Studies, Dr. Kumar analysed how relay translation alters texts through paratext, cultural adaptation, and linguistic shifts. Dr. Kumar's analysis explained the variations in the title, as it was translated into English and Hindi. The English title, *Change*, is a direct translation, while in Hindi the title was transliterated into *Ham Tum aur Voh Truck*. Further, distinct cover designs, and varied forewords facilitated the reframing of the text for different audiences.
- The speaker also noted that cultural and linguistic adaptations included domestication of Chinese references in Hindi, mistranslations of names, and colloquial simplifications, which reshaped Mo Yan's reflective voice into a more humorous and intimate one.

- In conclusion, Dr. Kumar argued that while relay translation remains an important vehicle for circulation, direct translations are essential if India is to engage meaningfully with Chinese literature.

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