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Photograph of China by T.C. Lin
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editor's note



See
a map
of China and
cultural miscellany
on
page 4.

CHIH MENG, of the China Institute in New York City, observed in his essay “The New Literature of Changing China” that “Not only have Chinese economic and political institutions and traditions been undergoing fundamental changes, but also the intellectual life of the literati has been drawn into the revolutions of the masses. Chinese literature, the most stabilizing factor in Chinese culture, has not escaped the far-reaching influences of a rapidly changing modern China.” These words first appeared in the Winter 1935 issue of *Books Abroad* (BA 9:1, 10–11), the precursor to *World Literature Today*, and are prophetic and relevant as we view Chinese literature of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

China’s ongoing cultural, economic, and sociopolitical influence worldwide is reflected not only by our commitment for nearly three-quarters of a century to providing coverage of Chinese literature, but also by our efforts to improve such coverage, as evidenced by the special section on contemporary mainland Chinese literature in this issue. Historically, our reporting on Chinese literature has mainly been made possible by our international network of contributing specialists, reviewers, and translators as well as Chinese literary publishers located primarily in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, France, and Great Britain. In the U.S., we have recently relied on such distributors as China Books and Schoenhof’s Foreign Books as well as numerous publishers both small and large—including, among others, Renditions, New Directions, Green Integer, and Foreign Language Publications—to provide us with material by contemporary Chinese authors in Mandarin, Cantonese, or in translation.

Over the years, *WLT* has offered essays and review coverage of important Chinese writers from Lu Xun to Ding Ling to Wang Jiaxin and of such Chinese and Chinese American authors residing in the U.S. as Ha Jin, Frank Chin, Maxine Hong Kingston, Gish Jen, Amy Tan, and Anchee Min, to name just a few. Similarly, Hualing Nieh, Xiao Quian, Ha Jin, Li Young-Lee (born of Chinese parents), and Bei Dao have served as jurors for *WLT*’s Neustadt International Prize for Literature, whose candidates have included Dai Houying, Ba Jin, and Mo Yan.

*

QUITE PROPITIOUSLY, the University of Oklahoma and *WLT* have forged new and historic relations with Beijing Normal University (one of six Chinese universities with which OU has established official ties and academic exchanges), a collaboration this issue commemorates in part and without which our special section would not have been possible. Moreover, OU has been selected as the site for a Confucius Institute, part of a system of Chinese culture and language centers that currently exist in more than twenty-one countries worldwide (see page 39).

The intentions represented by *WLT*’s current efforts to spotlight and expand our coverage of contemporary Chinese literature are echoed by Chinese-born novelist Gao Xingjian, winner of the 2000 Nobel Prize in Literature—the first and only Chinese author to do so—when he declared in his Nobel lecture that “Literature transcends national boundaries—through translations it transcends language and then specific social customs and interpersonal relationships created by geographic location and history—to make profound revelations about human nature.” May our modest efforts to promote the latest in Chinese literature work toward the same end.

David Draper Clark