1. **Nominee: Fang Fang (方方), Juror: Michael Berry**

Dear Professor Stalling and Members of the Selection Committee;
It is my great honor to nominate the Chinese writer Fang Fang for the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature. Fang Fang is veteran writer whose career spans nearly fifty years, over which time she has created a voluminous body of published work that includes novels, novellas, short stories, essays, and non-fiction works of cultural history. Over the years, many of Fang Fang's works have had a profound impact on the cultural landscape of contemporary China: her novella *The Scenery* has long been regarded as one of the cornerstone works of the new realism of the 1980s; stories like *The Running Flame* and *The Setting Sun* inspired cultural debates about the place of women in contemporary Chinese society; expansive works of historical fiction like *The Walls of Wuchang* reimagined earlier chapters in modern Chinese history through a humanistic lens; the 2016 novel *Soft Burial* offered a powerful exploration of posttraumatic memory (and forgetting) of the Land Reform Movement; and her 2020 book *Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from a Quarantined City* became the first work to document the COVID-19 crisis and warn the world of the coming global health calamity. Running through these works is a deep commitment to shine a light on the inequalities and injustices faced by women in modern China, to reveal the traumatic scars of modern Chinese history and make them come alive through stories, and to champion free expression.

Fang Fang is the pen name for Wang Fang, one of contemporary China's most celebrated writers. Born into an intellectual family in Nanjing in 1955, Fang Fang spent most of her childhood in Wuhan, where she witnessed many of the political movements of Mao's China, from the Great Leap Forward to the Cultural Revolution. Fang Fang began writing poetry in 1975 and went on to graduate from Wuhan University with a degree in Chinese literature in 1982, the same year her first novel was published. Over the course of the next several decades, she has remained one of China's most prolific writers. Her novels, novellas, short stories, and essays have appeared in nearly 100 different editions, including translations into more than 20 languages, including English, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, Korean, and Japanese.

Over the course of her career, she has held numerous titles, serving as a writer with the Hubei Province Institute of Literature, Director of the Contemporary Chinese Fiction Research Center at Huazhong University of Science and Technology, and is the former Director of the Hubei Province Writer's Association. Her novellas *Scenery* and *The Broken Zither* were awarded prizes for Best Chinese Novella and she has been the recipient of numerous other honors, including the Lu Xun Literary Prize, and the Chinese Literature and Communications Prize for Outstanding Writer. Internationally, her honors include being selected as one of the most influential women of 2020 by the BBC, being awarded the prestigious Émile Guimet Prize for Asian Literature (Le Prix Émile Guimet de littérature asiatique) in 2021 for the French translation of her novel *Soft Burial*, and the 2025 Baifang Schell Prize for the English translation of her book *The Running Flame*. Her works in English include *Three Novellas by Fang Fang: Contemporary Chinese Women Writers V* (Various translators, Panda Books, 1996), *Children of the Bitter River: A Novel*. (Tr. Herbert Batt. Norwalk, CT: Eastbridge Books, 2007), *Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from a Quarantined City* (Tr. Michael Berry. HarperVia, 2020), and *Walls of Wuchang* (Tr.by Olivia Milburn, ACA Publishing, 2022), *Soft Burial* (Tr. Michael Berry. Columbia University Press, 2025) and *The Running Flame* (Tr. Michael Berry. Columbia University Press, 2025). While for the majority of her career, Fang Fang was in good standing with the Chinese state, having served in a variety of official roles and even having her fiction featured in textbooks throughout China, in 2016, Fang Fang became the target of a series of attacks. It was during that year that she published the novel *Soft Burial*, a literary exploration of the Land Reform Movement of the 1950s. The novel was

initially published to great critical acclaim, even being awarded the prestigious Lu Yao Literature Award. At the time, the jury applauded the novel for its ability to "perfectly combine both critical and literary elements" and complimented its "rich aesthetic vision and its penetrating ability to see through different layers of history." *A Soft Burial* quickly came to be recognized as one of the most important novels in Fang Fang's oeuvre. A symposium about the novel was held in Beijing with leading literary critics to celebrate its literary achievements and unique reappraisal of history. However, shortly after its initial publication, an alternative and markedly critical discourse also started to develop around the novel. Eventually, those criticisms grew more heated and in May of 2017 *Soft Burial* was banned in China and all reviews and mention of the novel was swiped from the internet within the People's Republic of China.

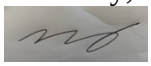
On January 25, 2020, Fang Fang began publishing an online blog documenting life in Wuhan during the height of the novel coronavirus outbreak. Her entries were posted each night, often in the early am hours, reflecting on various aspects of daily life under quarantine, online discourse about the virus, stories about how friends and family are coping with the tragedy, and the political response within China. *Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from a Quarantined City* collected Fang Fang's writings on the COVID-19 outbreak, which was the most celebrated and widely disseminated non-official account of the health crisis in Wuhan. Originally posted on the Chinese social media platforms Weibo and Wechat, each entry was forwarded by an army of loyal followers and many of the entries had in excess of 50,000,000 readers. The account was singled out for its honesty, which included a series of incredibly brave passages that called out Chinese officials for early missteps and demanded accountability. The diary was also critically acclaimed by *The New York Times, The New Yorker, LA Times, Guardian, the London Times, NPR, BBC,* and other major media outlets around the world.
As *Wuhan Diary* gained more attention internationally, it also became targeted by the same group of internet trolls who had previously attacked *Soft Burial*. Fang Fang's was subjected to death threats, thousands of slanderous attacks, her works were banned, and even people who spoke up in her defense were targeted. The protracted disinformation campaign against Fang Fang continued for three years; it was the most aggressive and sophisticated political campaign against a Chinese writer since the Cultural Revolution. Globally, I know of no other book to elicit such controversy since Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses. Wuhan Diary* had not only tapped into the COVID-19 pandemic, but it also became pulled into controversies that had been brewing about issues of accountability, transparency, and Sino-US Relations. Most importantly, during an era of intensifying repression of free speech, *Wuhan Diary* triggered a nation-wide debate about the responsibility of the individual to bear witness in times of crisis and the very nature of civil society in China. The book proved extremely prescient, anticipating many of the defining characteristics of the COVID-era – the end of globalism, mass quarantines, disinformation campaigns, political extremism, and the rise of "fake news." The book also provided a powerful testament to one individual's ability to bear witness, speak truth to power, and alert the world to what would become the most significant global health crisis in a century.

As the English-language translator of several of Fang Fang's books, I initially hesitated about nominating an author I had translated for this award. I did not want to appear that my nomination was at all tainted by self-interest. Over the course of the past thirty years, I have translated more than a dozen novels by some of the most outstanding Chinese-language writers in the world, including works by former Newman Prize winners Wang Anyi and Mo Yan. While my perspective may not be entirely objective, my unique position has also allowed me to observe qualities I have never before witnessed in any other writer. I was able to witness first-hand the horrific attacks that Fang Fang was subjected to, the political pressure she faced, and the threats to her personal safety that she had to endure: High level

politicians pressured her to cancel the publication of the book internationally, a celebrity martial artist issued a public call for her to be tracked down and "punished," people posted Cultural Revolution-style denunciation posters around her neighborhood and threw bricks into her courtyard, her friends and family were subjected to a vicious "witch hunt," and every day there were death threats. As her translator, I worked under the constant fear that Fang Fang might one day be arrested, physically assaulted, or simply disappear. And yet living alone in a quarantined city assailed by a strange virus that no one really understood and facing daily attacks, Fang Fang continued to write, she continued to bear witness and she did so with a combination of grace, dignity and courage that was both inspirational and awe-inspiring. Writing a diary should not be an act that requires bravery or moral strength, but in this case it did. I began translating *Wuhan Diary* to help raise awareness about COVID-19, but over the course of my experience I learned much more important lessons from Fang Fang about a writer's moral integrity, strength of will, and courage to remain true to her calling.

Translating *Wuhan Diary* also provided me with a unique vantage point from which to witness the impact of the book. While I too was subjected to thousands of online attacks and even death threats, I also caught glimpses of the light: thousands of messages from everyday Chinese readers telling me how Fang Fang's account provided them with comfort, hope and inspiration during one of the darkest periods in Wuhan's modern history. They were the readers who stayed up every night, often past 2:00am waiting for Fang Fang to upload her next post; they were the ones who forwarded the diary to their friends and commented on the seemingly endless comments thread that followed each post. As one Chinese netizen wrote to me: "The road to enlightenment is long…as is the road to civility. Chinese culture is still on that road and moments of hope and hopelessness are inevitable along the way, but neither of us are standing on the sidelines." While Fang Fang may be restricted from publishing any new fiction in China, she continues forge ahead and to write and bear witness through her fiction, albeit, now silently. Thank you for considering Fang Fang for this tremendous honor. I know of no other writer who, in the face of such violence, fear, and pressure, could have risen up and done what she did; and I know of no other writer more deserving of this honor.

Sincerely,



Michael Berry, Director, Center for Chinese Studies,
Professor of Contemporary Chinese Cultural Studies,
Department of Asian Languages & Cultures, UCLA.

章程

纽曼华语文学奖由美国俄克拉荷马大学美 中关系研究所设立，每两年颁发一次，旨 在表彰对华语写作做出杰出贡献的文学作 品（含小说、散文、诗歌和戏剧）及其作者。纽曼奖以文学价值为唯一的衡量标准， 不论是成就卓越的名家或是后起之秀，任 何在世的坚持用华语写作的作者都有被推 荐的资格。

由知名专家组成的国际评委会通过透明的投票程序提名候选人并遴选出获奖者。获奖者将被授予 10,000 美元和奖匾一幅，并应邀到俄克拉荷马大学参与发奖仪式和学术活动。纽曼奖得益于纽曼夫妇的慷慨赞助，特此鸣谢。

Charter

The Newman Prize for Chinese Literature is awarded biennially in recognition of outstanding achievement in prose or poetry that best captures the human condition, and is conferred solely on the basis of literary merit. Any living author writing in Chinese is eligible, and the Prize may serve to crown a lifetime’s achievement or to direct attention to a developing body of work.

An international jury of distinguished experts will both nominate the candidates and select the winner, based on a transparent voting process. The winner will receive USD10,000 and a commemorative plaque, and will be invited to the University of Oklahoma to attend the award ceremony. The Prize honors Harold J. and Ruth Newman, whose generous endowment for a chair at the University of Oklahoma enabled the creation of the OU Institute for US-China Issues.