1. Nominee: Zhang Yueran 张悦然

Juror: Dylan Levi King

I nominate Zhang Yueran 张悦然 (1982-) for the 2027 Newman Prize for Chinese Literature. Zhang Yueran became the post-’80s writer that everyone dreamed was coming—the writer that would capture the experience of the generation born after 1980. It is difficult now to put into words quite what that meant. Although that feat—defining her generation in literature—is enormous, it cannot define her. Over the course of two decades, Zhang Yueran has become a writer who discovers the universal and the timeless in the particular. But I think it’s worthwhile to linger for a moment on the post-1980s literary moment.

Zhang Yueran was born in 1982, but she began her writing career very young, publishing in *Mengya* 萌芽 in her early teens, and winning the New Concept Writing Competition while still in high school. The work that came to define the first half of her career was completed while she was studying computer science at the National University of Singapore. She published bestselling short story collections and novels while still in her early twenties. This was a peculiar and important time to begin work as a writer. The world was changing in ways perceptible to everyone in the country but difficult to articulate. Pure literature seemed threatened by marketization and the weakening of the literary bureaucracy. The political and social meaning of literature was up for debate.

The Chinese fin de siècle presented people and situations that had not yet been written into Chinese literary history. In other words, for the American or Japanese writer, there were halfway credible models for the present that simply didn’t exist for the Chinese writer.

There was comparatively little fiction in any language that came close to presenting something like Chinese urban life in the 1990s and early 2000s. Yes, it was, like nearly every literate, internet-connected society, a swarm of disaffected, atomized individuals, but one that still needed to be analyzed, as Chairman Mao put it, according to the concrete practices of the country. Unlike the writers of the generation before hers, access to the traditional and contemporary was not quite so unreliable or unrepresentative; and she had the freedom and the challenge of sorting through it as she pleased. It is easy to make everything new when everything *seems* new; it is difficult to come up with fresh ideas when you have access to much of what has been written over the past thousand years.

Zhang Yueran succeeded at digesting local and global tradition and the contemporary; she succeeded in writing about a unique time and age. While they may have seemed overly whimsical at the time, especially compared to the heavy-duty epics of the old guard, or even the urban striver story that dominated discourse, there was something prophetic about the gnomic stories that made up her first collections in 2002 and 2003—*Sunflower Lost in 1890* 葵花走失在 1890 and *Ten Love Stories* 十爱. The dreamy symbolism, adolescent longing, and emotional intensity of *The Distance of Cherries* 樱桃之远, her 2004 full-length debut about a pair of classmates who grow up sharing a psychospiritual bond, too, seems strangely prophetic now that Zhang Yueran’s fiction played such a large role in the education of a generation of “Douban writers”—the influential millennial authors that got their breaks posting stories and criticism on the site.

Had she ended her career with that early run, Zhang Yueran would still be remembered as the most talented author among those anointed as leaders of the literary post-’80s generation (it seems a sin to still have to mention the essayist and race-car driver Han Han 韩寒 and the bon vivant and plagiarist Guo Jingming 郭敬明 in an account of Zhang Yueran’s career, but post-’80s literature was run by a trio at some point). But Zhang Yueran, rather than taking the commercial path open to her—or, alternately, withdrawing to the tech industry, as she might have, with her degree in computer science—devoted herself to becoming a better writer and reader. After returning from Singapore, Zhang Yueran did a stint with the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa and studied for a degree in Classical Chinese at Renmin University. She taught a creative writing course for Renmin’s School of Liberal Arts, adapting the MFA program to the Chinese education system. She launched a literary magazine—*Newriting* 鲤—that brought cutting-edge contemporary writing to an audience unlikely to pick up *Harvest* 收获 or *People's Literature* 人民文学.

In 2016, more than a decade after her debut as a writer, she re-emerged with *Cocoon* 茧, the story of two old friends—Li Jiaqi 李佳栖 and Cheng Gong 程恭—reuniting to sort through the wreckage of their childhoods in the 1970s. On the surface, the novel resembles the century-spanning bildungsroman that every serious Chinese writer is expected to produce, but Zhang Yueran uses the model to interrogate literary mood and inspect the lingering trauma of her parents’ generation, and the divergent trajectories of the book's two protagonists to produce a clever explication of social stratification in post-revolutionary China.

Women, Seated 天鹅旅馆 (a more literal translation might be *Swan Hotel*), published another decade on, is a monumental work in which Zhang Yueran has brought all her observational abilities and talents as a writer to bear. The story of an ultra-wealthy family, their hapless son, and their maid, *Women, Seated* develops in a novel way the themes of social stratification that appeared in *Cocoon*. A novel of manners and a gloomy fantasy, *Women, Seated* seems timeless and perfectly of its time.

NEWMAN PRIZE FOR CHINESE LITERATURE

紐 曼 華 語 文 學 獎

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.