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## OTHER NATIONS

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### Good Earth For Fiction

"New Chinese Literature" by Judy Polumbaum, in *Poets & Writers Magazine* (Jan.-Feb. 1995), 72 Spring St., New York, N.Y. 10012.

Most observers of cultural developments in China assumed that the 1989 Tiananmen Square protest and massacre would have an extremely chilling effect, particularly on Chinese literature. But the cultural frost was not as severe as expected. Indeed, literature in China seems to be flourishing today, reports Polumbaum, a journalism professor at the University of Iowa. In the past year alone, about 10,000 short stories, 1,000 novellas, and 100 novels were published, and they include many "innovative and experimental" works.

From the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 through the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s, writing was "a politically foolhardy occupation," Polumbaum points out. As a result, novels and stories from that period were populated with "heroic workers and peasants. The characters were stereotyped, the plots banal, the language uninspired." But with Mao Zedong's death in 1976, new voices began to emerge and the range of acceptable characters was expanded. These new writers started to express "a backlog of grievances" dating from the late 1950s and the Cultural Revolution of 1966-69. Their writing was "a prelude to more daring and sophisticated work."

Today, Chinese fiction regularly features such topics as "abuse of power, romantic love and family life, the complexities of traditional culture, and the contradictions of contemporary life." Many of the new works—such as Wang Anyi's *Brocade Valley* (English translation, 1992), whose female protagonist has an extramarital affair, and Zhang Xianliang's *Good Morning Friends* (1987), about the erotic experiences of secondary school students—also include the kind of sexual explicitness that in decades past might have landed the author in a re-education camp. "These days," writes Polumbaum, "demotion or loss of one's job are more realistic dangers." While the risk of imprisonment for "the vaguest of offenses" reappeared after the Tiananmen tragedy, it is

far more remote today than in the past. "Prepublication censorship," says Polumbaum, "is [now] actually a rarity in China: certain topics ostensibly must be cleared by authorities ahead of publication, but this may or may not occur, and the list of literary taboos is constantly in flux." Outright bans "often backfire," Polumbaum notes, "by fueling demand and creating a black market."

Even controversial writers find a range of publishing options. An author whose book is rejected as too subversive by one publisher can now turn to another of the "more than 500 publishing houses and more than 4,000 printing establishments, along with legions of unlicensed, often fly-by-night operations," or strike a deal with one of the 500 literary journals or thousands of popular magazines and newspapers. Zhang's *Good Morning Friends*, for instance, first appeared in a provincial literary journal.

Some authors have even managed to turn the appearance of government censorship to their advantage. Jia Pingwa published his racy 1993 novel, *The Abandoned Capital*, with blanks in place of words supposedly excised by the censors, and the book became a runaway best seller. Although the novel eventually was officially banned (with little effect on sales), it now seems that the blanks may have been merely a promotional gimmick.

### Church and Stasi

"The 'Stasi' and the Churches: Between Coercion and Compromise in East German Protestantism, 1949-89" by John S. Conway, in *Journal of Church and State* (Autumn 1994), P.O. Box 97308, Waco, Texas 76798-7308.

"Kirche, wir danken dir!" ("Church, we thank you!") proclaimed a large banner paraded through the streets of Leipzig in late 1989. The Evangelical (Protestant) churches of the former East Germany had been instrumental in bringing down East German communism. But after the files of East Germany's hated secret police, the Stasi, were opened, the churches suddenly were cast in a much less flattering light, notes Conway, a historian at the University of British Columbia. Not only

## Vichy François

Writing in the *American Spectator* (Feb. 1995), Roger Kaplan, editor of *Freedom Review*, suggests that in soon-to-retire president François Mitterrand, "this immensely complex, shrewd man, this man of perverse loyalties as well as the most breathtaking selfishness," the French may well have seen "a true reflection of themselves."

François Mitterrand was a fascist in his youth. Evolving philosophically (or at least politically), the man who represents the French Left remained on friendly terms with some of the worst numbers in the Vichy regime of Marshal Pétain. Moreover, as president of the Republic, he had aided and abetted the National Front of Jean-Marie Le Pen, actively helping these Jew- and America-hating Saddamophiles go from one to 15 (20 in some regions) percent in the polls—not the opinion polls, mind you, the votes of French citizens. . . .

The scandal that hit Paris last August was provoked by Pierre Péan's *Une Jeunesse Française*, a meticulously researched book on Mitterrand's career in the 1930s and '40s.

The shock was not so much in the broad fact of Mitterrand's participation in the Vichy regime that ran France under the German shadow from the summer of 1940 until the summer of 1944. That was already known. Rather, it was in the details: the sincerity with which he had engaged himself, the enduring loyalties that he formed while there. What was intolerable to those who for years had bought Mitterrand's own rationale—Vichy was a cover for Resistance work—was the feeling of having been had. Which is exactly how Jean Daniel put it in a lead editorial in his weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur*, the conscience

and weathervane of the French Left and the Paris intelligentsia. What Daniel expressed was not only exasperation with the 50-year game of "love me, love me not" that Mitterrand has played with the French people, and the French Left, but the feeling that the French had never sufficiently expiated the sins of the fascist Vichy regime. . . .

[But] the Left has no case for pretending "it did not know." The only thing you could plausibly say "it did not know" was that Mitterrand continued to maintain personal relations with fascists and killers, of whom [René] Bousquet [who sent thousands to the death camps] was the most notorious. Until some Jewish organizations finally got wise to [Mitterrand] and raised the issue, he

put flowers on Pétain's grave ("The hero of Verdun") every year. But the substance of all these revelations was known. Thus the question really is this: What did the Left think it was doing?

The Left was trying to do what Mitterrand himself was doing, and what, in a certain sense, much of France has always done, which is to have it both ways. Vichy comes back at the French again and again, and they react by saying, "Indeed, let us have it out once and for all," and then when they see what that entails, they shove it back into the closet. But little by little, the honesty becomes colder, the facts come out more clearly, the French feel a little better.



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had the clergy been infiltrated, but church leaders for many years had held secret talks with the Stasi.

Theological conservatives, mainly from West Germany, charged that the East German churches had been wholly misguided in recent decades in seeking an accommodation with socialism and the Marxist state; they had neglected the church's prophetic duty to resist tyranny and injustice, and by meeting with the Communists, and even the Stasi, had "sold out" the church. Radicals from the church-related "basis groups," who had helped topple the regime, also demanded that the churches face their failures. The East German bishops, however, took a "cautious and hesitant stance" toward any "Declaration of Guilt."

The critics have lost perspective, Conway contends. The bishops, pastors, and other ecclesiastical leaders had to operate in the same "murky world of corruption, espionage, and intimidation which marked the daily experience of the East German people." The revelations that perhaps 113 pastors worked for the Stasi were shocking, Conway says, but those spies represented only a small fraction of the roughly 4,000 pastors in the former East Germany.

That Manfred Stolpe, the former chief administrative officer of the East German Church Federation, and other church leaders had secret contacts with Stasi and other officials was much more disturbing, Conway notes. Stolpe claimed that in more than 1,000 meetings with the Stasi, he—with the backing of his ecclesiastical superiors—had sought only to protect church interests, to keep suspected individuals out of the Stasi's clutches, and to prevent worse repression. But the fact that the secret talks were held meant that the churches could not claim to have been "merely the innocent victims of Stasi machinations," Conway notes. How far their "collaboration" went, or what the consequences were, is not clear.

The churches' very involvement in the anti-government opposition had ambiguous origins. During the 1970s, the Stasi began to encourage so-called "progressive elements" within the churches, letting compliant churchmen travel to ecumenical meetings abroad

and secretly subsidizing organizations such as the Prague-based Christian Peace Conference. During the 1980s, things started to get out of control, as church leaders and the basis groups of peace activists began "to criticize all militarism, including that of the Soviet Union." Church-organized peace meetings in 1981 drew large crowds, especially of young people; soon, new groups of human-rights and other activists sprang into existence.

Stasi officials met secretly with church leaders and demanded that they bring the basis groups to heel. Whatever the inclinations of the churchmen may have been, they knew they would lose all credibility with their supporters if they tried. In 1989, Conway reports, "the wave of protests and demonstrations sharply increased. In church halls and basements, where there had been scores, hundreds now took part in public discussions calling for reform. In Leipzig, where the Monday prayer meetings for peace had attracted hundreds, thousands now turned up and the crowds spilled out into the streets." The eventual result was completely unambiguous, the collapse of communism, and for helping to bring it about, Conway insists, the churches still deserve much credit.

## *On Being Nordic*

"Between Balts and Brussels: The Nordic Countries after the Cold War" by Ole Wæver, in *Current History* (Nov. 1994), 4225 Main St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19127.

During the Cold War, the five Nordic countries took a lofty stance toward the East-West struggle, calling for peace, disarmament, and alternatives to confrontation. With the end of the Cold War, they suddenly got their wish—and were none too happy about it, writes Wæver, a lecturer in international relations at the University of Copenhagen.

For the Nordic nations, the Cold War was ideal, he says. "Their rhetoric—their national image—depended on being against and maintaining a distance from the Cold War, but that was pleasant. They had lower tensions, no nuclear weapons, no foreign troops." Norway and Denmark played