Bo Juyi or Po Chü-i (772-846), Chinese poet and government official. He held various posts, starting in the palace library and rising to become a provincial governor; he retired from public life as mayor of Luoyang (Lo-yang), the eastern capital. One of the greatest writers of the Tang (T’ang) dynasty, which was renowned for its poetry, Bo Juyi was much influenced by his predecessor Du Fu (Tu Fu). Believing that literature should have a social purpose, Bo Juyi employed satire and humor in his work to protest against contemporary evils. His poetry was extremely popular in his own time; its elegantly simple style still attracts readers.
Chen Kaige

Chen Kaige, born in 1952, Chinese motion-picture director and screenwriter, whose films are internationally known for their epic historical narratives, lush cinematography, and emotionally complex characters. A leading member of China’s so-called fifth generation of filmmakers, Chen makes films that are successful both artistically and commercially. Working within the confines of China’s state-run and censored film industry, he manages to produce movies that address important political and social issues, although some of his films have been banned in his homeland.

Chen was born in Beijing. His father, Chen Huaikai, was a film director. Chen Kaige worked as a lumberjack in a remote area of southern China during the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976, a period of social upheaval in which the government forced intellectuals to do manual labor in rural areas. On his return he enlisted in the army. Chen later enrolled in the Beijing Film Academy, graduating in 1982. He and director Zhang Yimou were members of the first group of Chinese directors to emerge after the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s. They were dubbed the fifth generation by film historians, who had grouped earlier directors in a similar manner.

Chen has mostly made films set in the past, thereby evading concerns of censors about critiques of contemporary China. His first feature, Huang tu di (Yellow Earth, 1984), set a trend for uncompromising narrative content—it explored the failure of communist principles in rural China—and gorgeous camerawork. Next came the made-for-television film Qiang xing qi fei (Forced Take-Off, 1985), followed by Da yue bing (The Big Parade, 1986), Hai zi wang (King of the Children, 1988), and Bian zou bian chang (Life on a String, 1991).

Ba wang bie ji (Farewell, My Concubine, 1993) is perhaps Chen’s best-known film. It deals with homosexuality and recent Chinese history, both taboo subjects in China, as it follows the lives of two opera stars. The film was initially banned in China, then edited and released to international acclaim. The movie shared the 1993 Palme d’Or (or Golden Palm, the award for best picture) with New Zealand director Jane Campion’s The Piano at the famed Cannes Film Festival. Chen’s film also captured the Golden Globe Award for best foreign film.

Chen’s Feng yue (Temptress Moon, 1996) explores emotion and sexual passion more openly but resembles his earlier films in its epic scope and rich cinematography. Other films by Chen include Jing ke ci qin wang (The Emperor and the Assassin, 1999), the English-language Killing Me Softly (2002), and Mo gik (The Promise, 2005).
Du Fu

Du Fu or Tu Fu (712-770), Chinese poet, regarded by many as the greatest Chinese poet. Du Fu was raised according to Confucian tradition in a family known for its scholarly interests. Having failed the examination that would have assured him a government post, he spent much of his youth traveling around China. For a while he was influenced by Daoist (Taoist) philosophy and by the poet Li Bo (Li Po), but eventually he reembraced Confucianism and returned to life in the imperial capital. Du Fu again failed to secure a bureaucratic position, and after the fall of the Tang (T’ang) dynasty he suffered financial hardship. He traveled about in poverty until his death. Du Fu's early poetry is marked by lyrical praise of the beauties of the natural world, but as his own life became more difficult, elements of satire and expressions of somber feeling about the suffering of humankind entered his verse.
Gao Xingjian

Gao Xingjian, born in 1940, Chinese-born writer and artist, winner of the 2000 Nobel Prize for literature. Gao’s novels and plays have won critical acclaim but have been banned in his native China for violating cultural restrictions there. He is the first Chinese-born writer to win the Nobel Prize for literature.

Gao was born in Ganzhou, a city in Jiangxi province in southeastern China. His mother, an actress, exposed him to theater and the arts while he was still a child. Gao earned a degree in French literature and language from a college in Beijing in 1962 and then worked as a translator and critic. In 1966 the Cultural Revolution began in China, and Gao was one of many artists and intellectuals who were sent to “reeducation” camps to perform manual labor. During this time he was compelled to burn a whole suitcase full of his writings.

The Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, but Gao was unable to publish any of his work until 1979. In 1981 he published Xian dai xiao shuo ji qiao chutan (A Preliminary Discussion of the Art of Modern Fiction), a book of essays. Combining experimental forms with traditional Chinese styles, Gao attracted notice as a playwright with Juedui xinhao (1982; Alarm Signal, 1996), which was produced in Beijing’s Theatre of Popular Art. His 1983 absurdist play Chezan (The Bus Stop, 1996) was very popular but drew the wrath of Chinese government ministers, who shut the production down after a few weeks as part of their campaign against “intellectual pollution.” Gao’s play Bi’an (1990; The Other Side, 1997) was also banned in China. Harassed by the government, he left the country a year later and settled in France.

After the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, Gao renounced his membership in China’s Communist Party. The bloody confrontation became the backdrop for his play Taowong (1992; Fugitives, 1993), a work that led Chinese officials to ban all of his writings in his native country. In 1990 Gao published the novel Ling Shan (Soul Mountain, 2000). Partly inspired by a ten-month walking tour of the Yangtze River that Gao had undertaken in the early 1980s, the novel features different narrators wandering through rural Chinese villages and among the peasants in an episodic search for meaning in life. The Nobel Committee emphasized Soul Mountain in its citation, calling it “a tapestry of narratives with several protagonists who reflect each other and may represent aspects of one and the same ego.”
Li Bo

Li Bo or Li Po (701-62), Chinese poet, one of the greatest figures of Chinese literature. Li Bo was born into the minor nobility in what is now Sichuan (Szechwan) Province. After an apprenticeship with a Daoist (Taoist) hermit and a time of wandering, he lived briefly as a poet at the Tang (T’ang) court in Chang’an but left as the result of intrigue. Then he returned to a life of Daoist study and carefree reflective wandering, writing poems and enjoying nature and the pleasures of wine, supplied free by the emperor's orders. According to legend, Li Bo was drowned while drunkenly leaning from a boat to embrace the moon's reflection on the water.

Most of Li Bo's vast output is lost, but about 2000 poems collected in 1080 are remarkable for their musical quality, rich and exact imagery, and beauty of language. Their themes are the sorrows of those separated by the demands of duty, the relief found in wine, and a Daoist appreciation for the awesome tranquillity of mountains and rivers and a sense of the mysteries of life.
Li Qingzhao

Li Qingzhao or Li Ch'ingchao (1084?-1151?), best-known female poet writing in China prior to the 20th century. She wrote primarily in a poetic form known as the song lyric (ci or tz’u) in which new words were composed for singing to familiar melodies. The genre was popular from the 11th century to the 13th century. She infused its stylized language with a sense of spontaneity and genuine emotion.

Li Qingzhao was born into a literary family and received an excellent education in traditional Confucian learning. She shared literary and scholarly interests with her husband, Zhao Mingchen. According to her own description, her early married years were idyllic; she and her husband were matched in both intellect and literary ability. In 1127 Jurchen tribes from the north invaded and conquered much of northern China, forcing the couple to flee southward, carrying with them their huge collection of books and antiques. In 1129 Zhao Mingchen died, and Li Qingzhao moved from place to place, following the political fortunes of the time. Although it is said that she later remarried, little is known of her last years.

The song lyric genre in which Li Qingzhao composed all her most famous poems was formally demanding. It required great technical precision, in which Li Qingzhao took particular pride. At the same time, its highest goal was to achieve the ease and direct language of speech. The best song lyrics should sound like everyday speech but be phrased so perfectly that not a word could be changed or omitted. This quality comes through perfectly in Li Qingzhao’s most famous lyric, “Sheng-sheng man” (“Every Note Slow”), in which she evokes a mood of melancholy and closes by talking about how such words as sorrow or melancholy fail to describe the feeling adequately. The implicit message of the lyric is that feeling can be expressed only in the way one speaks about things and not merely in the words used to categorize feelings.

Although fewer than a hundred of Li Qingzhao’s song lyrics survive, they are considered among the finest examples of the form. The unique combination of self-discipline and naturalness in her poems served as an important model for a fuller development of women’s literature in China during the 16th and 17th centuries.
Lin Yutang (1895-1976), Chinese writer and philologist, born in Changzhou, and educated at Saint John's University in Shanghai, Harvard University, and the University of Leipzig. From 1923 to 1926 he taught English philology at the University of Beijing. He subsequently devised a Chinese indexing system and helped formulate the official plan for romanizing the Chinese language. After 1928 he lived mainly in the U.S. His many works represent an attempt to bridge the cultural gap between East and West. The first two books, *My Country and My People* (1935) and *The Importance of Living* (1937), written in English in a charming and witty style, brought him international fame. Others include *Between Tears and Laughter* (1943), *Famous Chinese Short Stories Retold* (1952), *The Chinese Theory of Art* (1967), and the novels *Moment in Beijing* (1939) and *The Vermillion Gate* (1953).
Lu Xun or Lu Hsun (1881-1936), China’s foremost modern writer and intellectual, whose works have exerted a profound impact on modern Chinese literature and society. A household name throughout China, Lu Xun is generally acknowledged as a leader of the May Fourth Movement, a 1919 revolution that sought to modernize Chinese social and intellectual life. For political leader Mao Zedong and his followers, Lu Xun was a pioneer of Communist thought.

Born Zhou Shuren in Shaoxing, a city in eastern China, he received a traditional education with family tutors before entering school in Nanjing. In 1902 he went to Japan to study medicine, but in 1906 he abruptly terminated his medical studies to devote himself to literary endeavors. He believed that only through literature could he hope to reform Chinese society and change the collective soul of his people. After returning to China in 1909 and emerging from a period of mental depression, Lu Xun achieved literary renown in 1918 with the short story “Kuangren Riji” (Diary of a Madman). The story appeared in The New Youth, a journal that initiated the May Fourth or New Culture Movement. Because it was written in the contemporary vernacular and offered a devastating critique of traditional Chinese culture, it has been hailed as China’s first modern story. Two collections of short stories followed in the 1920s, during which time Lu Xun taught Chinese literature at universities in Beijing and other cities.

Throughout his creative life Lu Xun was deeply tormented by a conflict between his inner pessimism and his public stance in favor of building a new Chinese nation and society. These struggles carried over into his creative writings, in which he experimented with a variety of techniques and genres. Toward the end of his life, he settled in the cosmopolitan city of Shanghai, turned to Communism, and founded the League of Left-Wing Writers. But he never joined the Chinese Communist Party, and his relationships with its leaders were strained by personal conflicts and ideological differences. He died a tormented man who harbored no illusions about the success of revolution. However, the Chinese Communists glorified Lu Xun as a great revolutionary writer in view of his literary renown and his stance against the Nationalist government, which the Chinese Communists overthrew in 1949.

In addition to his short stories, Lu Xun also produced 16 volumes of essays; a collection each of personal reminiscences, prose poetry, and historical tales; about 60 poems in the classical style; half a dozen volumes of scholarly research, primarily on Chinese fiction; and translations of numerous works of Russian, Eastern European, and Japanese literature. At least four editions of his complete works, including his extensive diaries and correspondence, have been published. English-language collections of his writing include Lu Xun: Selected Works (four volumes, 1980), The Complete Stories of Lu Xun (1981), and Diary of a Madman and Other Stories (1990).
Qu Yuan

Qu Yuan or Ch'u Yuan (343?-315? BC), earliest known Chinese poet, whose works combine expressions of personal suffering, political commentary, and descriptions of imaginary flight through the heavens.

Qu Yuan’s life is shrouded in legend. Scholars believe he was born into an aristocratic family in the kingdom of Chu in south central China during a period of disunity, when many Chinese states were contending for power. He served as an adviser to the king of Chu, but political feuding in the royal court led to attacks on his character, and he was twice banished to a wilderness in the southern part of the kingdom. After his second banishment Qu Yuan, overcome with indignation at having been maligned and misjudged, committed suicide by drowning himself in the Miluo River.

Qu Yuan’s most famous work is a poem of 372 lines entitled “Li sao” (translated as “On Encountering Trouble” in 1959). The poet begins by telling the story of how he tried to serve the king loyally but was driven away. Most of the poem describes his flight through the skies in a chariot drawn by dragons, hopelessly searching for the perfect woman to be his mate. (The woman can be allegorically interpreted as a virtuous ruler who could appreciate Qu Yuan’s abilities.) The poem has been admired as the earliest example of a lyric written in the first person in which the poet speaks as an individual rather than as a representative of a particular sphere of society.

“Li sao” and a number of other poems attributed to Qu Yuan occupy the first part of a collection of poems published in English as *Chu ci: Songs of the South* (1959). While most scholars accept the attribution of “Li sao” to Qu Yuan, much debate has surrounded the authorship of other pieces. In spite of their uncertain authorship, these poems serve as important examples of ancient Chinese religious poetry and include songs to gods and goddesses; questions in verse about ancient myths and the origin of the universe; and two so-called soul summons, in which a priest tries to call a soul back to the body of a dead or dying king.
Su Dongpo

Su Dongpo or Su Tung-p'ó, pseudonym of Su Shi (Su Shih) (1036-1101), Chinese poet, essayist, artist, and public official. Because of his political opinions, expressed in a large body of satiric verse as well as in essays and letters, he was exiled for a time. Nevertheless, his writing generally voiced optimism. His simple but evocative poetry, inspired by Daoist (Taoist) and Buddhist principles, expresses regret for the fleeting beauty of life. A leading exponent of tz'u, poetry based on popular songs, he worked to free this form from rigid metrical convention.
Wang Wei

Wang Wei (699-759), Chinese painter and poet, a figure of legendary stature; Wang is considered the founder of the pure landscape style of painting and was one of the masters of lyric verse in the Tang (T’ang) dynasty.

Wang's poems, which are preserved, are admired for their sensitivity to nature. His work as an artist is known only in a few inadequate rubbings taken from stone engravings of his famous Wang-ch'uan hand scroll and in paraphrases of his paintings by later artists (such as the Landscape in the Academy of Arts, Honolulu, Hawaii). Most information about his significance as a painter comes from literary sources. He is believed to have been the first painter to treat landscape as an evocation of nature rather than as a vehicle for colorful, artificial decorations, which was the accepted manner of his day. He regarded landscape painting as an intimate communion with nature and is credited with the statement, “When you paint a landscape, it is more important to use your instinct than your brush.” Wang is also credited with several far-reaching technical innovations—notably, the monochromatic ink style, which depended for its effect solely on a stringent and expressive use of black or gray ink washes and multiple small brushstrokes. A scholar-poet who withdrew from society to paint, he was considered by later Chinese art historians to be the founder of the Southern School of Chinese art and became the model for the later literati (wen-jen) artist, or unworldly poet-painter.