

Yu Zhang

13 April 2012

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Dear Yu Zhang

Thank you for the letter from you and other PEN colleagues dated 10 April 2012.

In the UK we are proud of our long tradition of freedom of expression - it is one of the core British values and firmly embedded in our society. While English PEN and other organisations are established to campaign on issues such as freedom of expression around the world, the British Council's purpose is different. Our role is to grow cultural understanding, and ultimately trust, between the UK and other countries through our work in the Arts, English and Education.

Ours is a story of long-term engagement. For example, we have been in China continuously since 1979; Russia since the early 1990s; and Egypt since 1938. And we stay in countries through good times and bad. In all that we do we seek to convey a sense of British values, accomplishments and qualities. We believe that exposure to our open and pluralistic society leads to long term benefits both for the UK and the countries in which we operate. Our best artists and writers are unafraid to question the political status quo and it is often these figures that are most attractive to international audiences and best reflect our evolving society.

For each of the last five years the British Council has worked in partnership with London Book Fair to curate a cultural programme alongside the professional programme of the LBF, which is a business fair for the publishing industry. In doing so we work with the appropriate agency in the guest country to work on the arrangements for the Pavilion and the professional and cultural programmes. So, with China the Market Focus this year the LBF and the British Council are working with is GAPP/CNPIEC, along with a range of UK and Chinese partners. After our own consultations, we invited 20 writers from China with established reputations for varied and high quality writing and we are confident that their presence at the LBF will give publishers and others a valuable and stimulating insight into China and Chinese literature.

The writers we are welcoming to London this week do not represent a country or ideology; they are first and foremost writers. It is in our interest to engage openly and frankly with them and also to ensure that there are ever greater opportunities for further exchanges with them and others in the coming years.

The London Book Fair is just one moment in a continuing series of exchanges with writers from China. We will continue to work with others to ensure that as wide a range of voices as possible are heard over the coming months and years.

China clearly wants to be part of a globalised world and the case for cultural relations with China is exceptionally strong because cultural exchange builds ties of mutual familiarity and brings benefits to both the UK and China. This is why we believe we must continue the cultural conversation with China.

Kind regards

(pp) Susana Galván

Martin Davidson