

PRESS INFORMATION

China - The hundreds of faces of a nation **The Frankfurt Book Fair's Guest of Honour China reflected in literature / Around 500 events are planned to date**

The current debate shows that we are full of questions for China - and in less than one week we will have the opportunity to pose them directly to China. "It is important that official China take a stand on Western values and sharpen its self-awareness - and by taking a step closer to us, it also challenges us to sharpen our own self-awareness", says Juergen Boos, Director of the Frankfurt Book Fair. Since 1976, the Frankfurt Book Fair has invited countries and regions to present their literature in Frankfurt. Since 1988, each respective Guest of Honour country has been responsible for financing and planning the content of its own appearance. There were intense debates in the run-up to several Guests of Honour, for example Turkey (2008), Korea (2005) or the Arab World (2004). "In hindsight, it has always been proven true that it was important and right for the Frankfurt Book Fair to provide a driving force and not to take the line of least resistance", said Thomas Minkus, spokesman for the Frankfurt Book Fair. Or, as the artist Ai Weiwei put it: "It is better when things happen than when they don't happen!" Around 300 publishers and agents from Mainland China, Macau and Hong Kong have announced that they will attend. Around 20 exhibitors from Taiwan will be presented at the Fair. From the People's Republic of China alone, there are a total of around 2,000 guests expected, among them authors, journalists and publishers.

Opinionated: Publishers, NGOs, authors and associations are speaking up

Frankfurt will present official China, but also the hundreds of faces of the other China: the faces of Chinese exiles, dissidents, and, last but not least, the view of China from the West. That is exactly the Guest of Honour principle: dialogue - intellectual debate through the medium of words. Over 230 exhibitors will offer up a total of around 500 events on the subject of China during the Book Fair. Around half of those are organised by institutions, publishers, associations and NGOs, the other half by the state organisation committee of Guest of Honour China. With support from the Federal Foreign Office, the Frankfurt Book Fair itself will set up two central places for exchange on the grounds of the Fair - the Forum Dialogue (Hall 6.1 E 913) and the International Centre (Hall 5.0 D 901).

The proximity of literature and politics will be emphasised in numerous events at the Fair. The Nobel Prize winner for literature Gao Xingjian, who lives in Paris, will talk with the poet Yang Lian, who lives in London, about living and writing in two cultures. The Uyghur P.E.N. President Abdulrusul ÖzHun, who lives in exile in Sweden, will lead a discussion about freedom of expression using China as an example. The President of the World Uyghur Congress Rebiya Kadeer is also expected to attend the Fair. The topic of Tibet will be discussed at numerous events, including the reading on the Sunday of the Fair entitled "Forbidden Reading" and the discussion hosted by the Tibet Initiative Germany, "Tibet blogged - China's fear of the freedom of expression", at which Kelsang Gyaltzen, the emissary of the Dalai Lama, will also be in attendance. Each day around midday, the P.E.N. Centre Germany will host a "Chinese hour" in Hall 3.1 with authors who are part of the Independent Chinese P.E.N. Centre. This series of events will also focus on solidarity with the author Liu Xiaobo, who has been wrongfully imprisoned for more than nine months. The founder of the Independent Chinese P.E.N. Bei Ling, who lives in the USA, and the environmental activist and author Dai Qing will appear in the International Centre, as well as in the Forum Dialogue.

Around 50 Chinese writers are coming to Frankfurt, about half of whom have been invited by publishers and individual event organisers. Authors like Mo Yan, who is well known in this part of the world thanks to the film adaptation of his novel "Das rote Kornfeld" ["Red Sorghum"], will be in attendance. Younger authors like Liu Zhenyun, Feng Li or the filmmaker and author Guo Xiaolu could become a new discovery for many readers. Literati living in exile, from Mainland China, from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau will be represented, including the illustrator and children's book author K. T. Hao from Taiwan, Chang Ta-Chun, who is very popular in Taiwan, and the poet and essayist Leung Ping-kwan from Hong Kong.

The work of the successful writer Yu Hua demonstrates, for example, the proximity of politics and literature: His novel "Brothers" about two dissimilar brothers at the time of the Cultural Revolution was awarded the top slot on the "Weltempfänger" bestseller list (www.litprom.de). The subject of Tibet is central to the novels by writer Alai, like "Ferne Quellen" ("Distant Sources"). With his novel "Beijing Coma", Ma Jian, who lives in London, deals with the massacre at Tiananmen Square. More than 400 German-language new releases from over 180 publishers will be presented in the context of the Frankfurt Book Fair. With about 60 fiction titles, over 20 children's books and around 30 anthologies, as

well as more than 250 non-fiction books on language, culture, history, politics and travel, it is clear that the curiosity about China is great. The more than 2,500 titles in the international book exhibition "Books on China" will also be on display at the hall Forum (Level 1).

The Guest of Honour principle: An incentive for dialogue

The negotiations with China lasted several years before the contract was signed in 2007. For the first time since its economic opening in 1978, China has also started to open itself up culturally over the past few years. With the establishment of Confucius Institutes worldwide, the government is promoting an understanding of Chinese culture. In the country itself, privatisation has, for the first time, started to include the publishing industry over the last few years. The more than 570 state publishers are increasingly being privatised over the stock exchange; the more than 10,000 private so-called "culture firms", which have led a niche existence to date, have been gaining strength. The Internet supports the role of the private publishers. Around 20 per cent of bestsellers originate from the Web. At the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2008 there was, for the first time, a collective stand of private publishers - a clear signal that China wants to open itself up culturally and impart its literature to the West. Along with this comes the country's huge effort to invest in the education of its citizens.

Since 1988, the Guest of Honour principle has been based on providing a platform for a hitherto undiscovered literature - and, with that, to provide the wide variety of players in the book industry a public platform, as well as the opportunity to exchange ideas. The responsibility for the organisation and the planning with regards to content, but also for financing the appearance, lies with the respective country. The Frankfurt Book Fair advises and coordinates. In addition, programme events come from independent organisers. Several events of the Frankfurt Book Fair are exceptions, like the annual exhibition "Books on ...", along with the traditional symposium in the run-up to the Fair, which illuminates the respective Guest of Honour, focusing on political, cultural and economic aspects. "The Frankfurt Book Fair provides the platform, opens up new communication channels and places literature in focus", said Book Fair spokesman Thomas Minkus regarding the role of the Fair. Each translation increases not only the economic collaboration among publishers, but also the cultural understanding among people - whether they be producers of literature or readers.