

Report on the work of WWC of ICPC

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Women Writers Committee of Independent Chinese PEN Center (ICPC) has been re-established a few months ago. The old one had been prepared since November 2005 before it was formed in July 2007 with Tienchi Martin-Liao, the current president of ICPC, as its coordinator. In November 2008, ICPC board decided revocation of WWC for the reason that ICPC needed to streamline its organizational structure, as we thought the necessity to concentrate our limited resources on the missions of two other important committees, the Writers in Prison Committee (WiPC) and Freedom to Write Committee (FtWC). FtWC is a committee to promote freedom of literary writings in China where there is now no freedom of expression at all.

So without a WWC for 8 years, we re-established it because of gender reviewing of our center after last year's Ourense congress of PEN International.

First of all, we need to attract more female members and expand the proportion of female members of ICPC.

The members of ICPC are residing in a number of countries and regions, including mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Australia, Canada, USA, UK, France, Sweden and Germany. There are 330 registered members right now, but only 56 females, 16%. So the WWC will try to expand the proportion of female members in ICPC.

Secondly, we began to realize that a WWC is very important for PEN, because the situation of Chinese women writers is quite pessimistic (why/how? I can elaborate later), so we should do something about it.

In the past 8 years, it is WIPC to do the work, mainly concerned with those imprisoned. We focused on the hardships of all Chinese mainland writers, as both male and female writers were usually treated on the same level, even relatively better situation for the female writers at the time when no female was included in our case list of imprisoned writers. But now when we revalue the situation, we think we need special concerns for women writers in Mainland China, as much more have been imprisoned and mistreated in recent years.

Among 56 female members, 14 are residing in mainland China. Their situation is very hard and difficult. Half of them (7 in total) are or were prisoned. One of them Liu Yanli has been detained since last September and charged with defamation for her allegedly posting a dozen of short messages in some friend circles on WeChat (Chinese style of Twitter), concerning the negative comments on CPC former and present leaderships, namely late Chairman MAO Zedong, late Premier ZHOU Enlai and current President XI Jinping, mostly copied from other online sources,

some even officially published in China (<http://www.chinesepen.org/english/227-liu-yanli>). It is recently known that her case had been turned back to the police for insufficient evidences but that she has not allowed to meet her lawyer as her case has been labelled as being concerned with the “state secrets”! Another six female members had the similar experience in prison.

One of them is the senior journalist and ICPC Honorary Director Gao Yu who was put into jail three times and won twice the Courage in Journalism Award from the International Women's Media Foundation. She also received several other prominent international awards. Last time when she was in prison, she was forced to plead guilty on China's official TV because the authorities arrested her innocent son and threaten to charge him as a co-defendant in her case if she refused to “confess”. Although not being writers in prison, the most of other 7 members have been closely monitored and harassed by the police so far. Some of them lost her work or couldn't find a job just for their dissident writings. And it's also difficult for them to get passports to visit Hong Kong, Taiwan and foreign countries. Liu Di, one of ICPC board members, is a typical example, who has never been succeeded to get a passport to go abroad although she was invited to attend activities held abroad many times.

We are also concern about the hardship of non-member female writers in Mainland China. Among all of 230 cases of Chinese writers in prison concerned by ICPC during past 15 years, there have been 16 female writers, including 3 still in prison, who are honorary members Su Changlan (<http://www.chinesepen.org/english/189-su-changlan>) and Li Tingyu (<http://www.chinesepen.org/english/225-li-tingyu>), beside Liu Yanli, one of our female members mentioned above.

The most famous example is the case of poet Liu Xia, a founding and honorary member of ICPC and also the wife of former and honorary president of ICPC Liu Xiaobo. Liu Xia has been under house arrest since her husband won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010. She has been isolated from her friends and outside world for six years. Another well-known case is Tibetan female writer Tsering Woeser, a laureate of ICPC's Lin Zhao Memorial Award, who has lived under close monitoring by the police for many years. She has been rejected for her passport to go abroad although her husband, also a famous dissident writer, was able to travel abroad several times.

There is another new case just happened in April. A Chinese-born American female writer SONG Lin (penname Yi Wa, or Eva) was taken away by several undercover policemen from her hotel in a city of Shanxi province when she was visiting her hometown there. It is said that because she published a book “Looking for the Survivors of the Great Famine” which unmask the miserable truth of the Great Famine caused by Mao Zedong's economic policies in China from 1958-1962 which leads at least more than 30 million Chinese died in starvation. Until now the whereabouts of Yi Wa has been unknown after she was taken away.

In the view of the low proportion of female members in the ICPC, as well as the difficulties of mainland Chinese women writers, we need to restart the WWC with plans to increase female

members and focus our concern on the situation of female writers in mainland. We predict that the situation may become worse under the rule of current dictator Xi Jinping. For this purpose, WWC will carry out a series of work, including organizing a women writers meeting in Hong Kong by the end of this year. It will be the first women meeting held by ICPC.

At this meeting, we will give Mahwash Sabet, Iranian female poet in prison, the Liu Xiaobo Courage Award. Last year we gave the same award to Dr. Abduljalil Al Singace, Bahraini dissident blogger in prison. This year ICPC have chosen an Iranian female poet to stress our focus more on female writers.