

SCHOLARS AT RISK

N E T W O R K

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H.E. Mr. Zhang Yesui

Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the United States of America
Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America
3505 International Place NW
Washington, DC 20008 USA

March 26, 2010

RE: Professor Cui Weiping

Your Excellency:

I am writing on behalf of the Scholars at Risk Network to express concern over public reports that Professor Cui Weiping, a prominent scholar and translator, was denied permission to leave China to participate in an academic conference in the United States. I respectfully write to ask you to inquire into the matter and to urge the appropriate authorities to explain publicly the circumstances of any restrictions on Professor Cui's travel or, if there are no official restrictions, to expedite approval of any pending or future travel requests.

Scholars at Risk (SAR) is an international network of over 220 universities and colleges in 29 countries dedicated to promoting academic freedom and its constituent freedoms of thought, opinion, expression, association and travel. In cases like Professor Cui's involving alleged infringement of these freedoms, Scholars at Risk investigates hoping to clarify and resolve matters favorably.

We understand that Professor Cui is a professor of film studies at the Beijing Film Academy. She was invited to attend the annual Association for Asian Studies (AAS) Conference to be held in Philadelphia, USA beginning yesterday, March 25, and ending on March 28, 2010. Professor Cui was to participate in a roundtable discussion on the topic, "Against Amnesia: History, Memory, and the Role of the Public Intellectual in 21st-Century China." The AAS is a scholarly, non-political, non-profit professional association. In recognition of her scholarship, the AAS offered to pay the costs of Professor Cui's registration and travel to the conference. We understand that Professor Cui filed the required request to travel for academic purposes with the relevant authorities in China with the required advance notice. We understand that she was in possession of a valid Chinese passport and US visa. We further understand that she was advised only days before her scheduled departure that she would not be given permission to travel. Reports indicate that no legal basis was given for the decision.

Free exchange of ideas is one of the most basic human rights and values of all academic communities. Freedom of travel is one of the most important avenues for furthering such exchange among academic colleagues. Recognizing this, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which China is a signatory, protects freedom of expression, right to travel and scientific exchange. Public reports that Professor Cui was denied without reason permission to travel to attend the AAS conference suggests that these rights have not been respected. Moreover, in the absence of any clearly legitimate, publicly expressed grounds for doing so, the apparent restricting of Professor Cui's travel suggests serious concerns not only about her ability to engage with colleagues in her field, but also about intimidation of intellectuals generally in China and about the ability to conduct world-class scholarship in such an

environment. These are suggestions we find particularly distressing given both China's rich intellectual history and the important role that China and Chinese universities and scholars in particular should play in the development of knowledge, research and scholarship in the 21st century.

We therefore respectfully urge you to investigate the situation and to urge the appropriate authorities to explain publicly the circumstances of any restrictions on Professor Cui's travel or, if there are no official restrictions, to expedite approval of any pending or future travel requests.

We thank you for your attention to this important matter, and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Robert J. Quinn
Executive Director

Cc:

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