

YOUTH

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Youwei Library is a hot spot for young bookworms in Sanmen county, Zhejiang province. Founded in 2012, the library hosts about 300 activities a year, including reading classes and a workshop on critical thinking. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Honoring visionaries who made a difference

British Council recognizes those who studied in UK and returned to help their communities, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

The end of the year is a time to reflect on what has gone and been done. In the spirit of the season, the British Council acknowledges achievements by graduates who studied in the United Kingdom.

Zhang Jin was one of the many who were honored at the Alumni Awards in Beijing in early December, an event hosted by the British Council.

Zhang, in her 30s, studied real estate finance in Cambridge in 2004-05.

In 2012, she quit a well-paid job in Hong Kong and returned to her hometown in Sanmen county, in Zhejiang province's Taizhou city, to build a library.

Zhang came up with the idea after she met a local youth during a vacation back home in 2011.

The high school graduate didn't have a clue about what he wanted to do and, like many of his generation, was only into computer games.

"It was quite a shock to me, reminding me of what it was like for myself at his age," Zhang recalls.

The experience in the UK and her love of reading led to the decision to establish the library.

She wanted to bring something tangible to her hometown.

Her Youwei Library hosts about 300 activities a year for students in Sanmen, including reading classes and a workshop on critical thinking. Crucially, the events are free.

Students and young people have responded enthusiastically.

"Usually we have 30-40 people participating in an activity," Zhang says.

The library offers immersive experiences for students and others to enjoy reading, communication, and it gives them opportunities to find a contributing role in society, she explains.

Zhang says the seeds of philanthropy were planted in her when she engaged in various activities with NGOs, including Bookstart and Oxfam.

"I learned how to do volunteer service, how to motivate people," she says.

Her knowledge also helped her deal with library development and management.

Zhang is one of the more than 1,200 applicants from over 100 countries applying for the Alumni Awards this year.

All candidates came from approximately 120 institutes of higher learning in the UK, covering law and



Top: Volunteers and students attend a summer camp activity in Youwei Library. Above: The United Kingdom is one of the top destinations for international students. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



"We only received 30,000 yuan (\$4,300) worth of donations seven years ago, and yet the figure rose to 1 million yuan by 2016."

Zhang Jin, founder of Youwei Library

finance to artificial intelligence and sustainable development. Most of them have used what they've learned in the UK to bring positive changes to their community, sector and country.

Matt Burney, director of the British Council in China, says: "One of the ways we can strengthen people-to-people ties is education exchange. These awards really recognize the importance of education exchange between people in the UK and China."

"We can use the Alumni Awards as a real opportunity to tell these people that they matter — they are shaping the world, they are creating stronger links between China and the rest of the world, of course, including the UK."

Nearly 600,000 people in China have studied in the UK since 1978.

"I think it is important to recognize this group of people through the Alumni Awards and the contribution they have made in building

trust between China and the UK," Burney says.

The Alumni Awards ceremony has been held in 12 countries worldwide.

An increasing number of Chinese students have chosen to study in the UK over the years and about 160,000 are currently studying there.

"The diversity of thought that Chinese students bring to the UK is incredibly important," Burney says.

The UK has also come up with favorable policies to draw in Chinese students.

In September, the UK government announced the new Graduate Route visa, allowing international students to live and work in the UK for two years after graduation.

"It will be launched quite soon. It is very good news, and will enable good quality students from China to continue to live in the UK," Burney says.

"After academic study, they (students) will be able to improve their prospects by gaining employment in the UK."

The British Council has also provided support information online for funding, scholarships and interview services, and has helped Chinese students deal with UK institutions, according to Burney.

"Each year we organize pre-departure briefings for students, providing them with comprehensive view of life and study in the UK," he says.

"We are also doing an increasing amount of work to provide people access to internships and job opportunities when they return to China."

At the moment, the British Council is working on the Alumni Platform, which will enable 600,000 UK alumni in China to network with each other in a productive way.

Speaking about her application for the Alumni Awards, Zhang considered it an opportunity to get more attention for her philanthropy work.

"We only received 30,000 yuan (\$4,300) worth of donations seven years ago, and yet the figure rose to 1 million yuan by 2016," Zhang says of her library.

Now, her library has more than 1,000 volunteers.

"I help them find resources and teach them how to better reach their audience, all of which is very interesting."

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British architecture institute constructs better cooperation

By XU LIN
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The Royal Institute of British Architects is laying solid foundations in China as it plans to open an office in Shanghai soon, its first on the mainland, and seeks to build up cooperation and construct greater educational structures.

The London-based professional body for architects was founded under a Royal Charter granted in 1837 and a Supplemental Charter in 1971. Its membership spans the globe.

"We've seen much demand in Beijing and Shanghai for the RIBA's expertise and collaboration, and the challenge is that we need to make sure we can service all of those expectations," says the RIBA's chief executive Alan Vallance, who recently visited Beijing and Shanghai.

For example, the institute will be running more member events, bringing architects from the United Kingdom to share ideas, according to Vallance.

The RIBA has more than 48,000 members worldwide, 6,000 of whom are outside of the UK, including about 1,400 in China.

"The reason we will set up in Shanghai first is because the majority of the existing members of the RIBA who live and work on the Chinese mainland are based in Shanghai. So we're looking to get their support to help us get started here," he says.

"Both Beijing and Shanghai are significant cities. We haven't made any firm plans for having a chapter in Beijing yet, but we expect to do that in the future."

Top architects, he says, set the standards which others aspire to, show a vision that others follow and are bold enough to carry out that vision. Constructing a building is a team effort and architects also need to foster a good relationship with their clients.

The RIBA is also an education institution that validates university courses around the world.

"There's a lot of demand for overseas validations as well, because universities value our brand and they know it represents the highest standard of education and practice," he says.

The RIBA has validated two schools of architecture in China — the university of Nottingham Ningbo China in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, and Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University in Suzhou, Jiangsu province. Both are Sino-foreign universities, set up by Chinese universities and their UK counterparts.

Gisela Loehlein, head of the Architecture and Design Department at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, hails the cooperation. "Students will benefit greatly since it will allow them access to an international network and become global professionals. The RIBA's chapter in Shanghai will further support that and enable a bridge from academia to practice that is of the highest professional level."

Vallance says they've held discussions with several Chinese universities who are interested in getting RIBA validation.

"Students will become our members if they are at a school of architecture validated by the RIBA. It will give them an additional qualification. If you're a RIBA chartered architect, you're deemed to be



"We've seen much demand in Beijing and Shanghai for the RIBA's expertise and collaboration ..."

Alan Vallance, chief executive of the Royal Institute of British Architects

qualified at the highest level of professional standards," Vallance says.

The global higher education company Quacquarelli Symonds released a list of the world's top universities in architecture and construction for 2019, based upon academic and employer reputation and research impact. Tsinghua University ranked 10th globally.

"It means the Chinese education of architects is as good as anywhere else, but there are many universities who have not made it to that same standard yet," Vallance says.

The RIBA validation process, he points out, aims to help these universities understand the quality of its architectural education, and what they need to do to get to that standard. The RIBA will assess them against that standard.

In October, the RIBA released the 2030 Climate Challenge, with a series of targets for practices to adopt to reduce operational energy, embodied carbon and drinking water usage. It aims to help architects meet net-zero (or better) whole life carbon for new and retrofitted buildings by 2030.

"Climate change is a global challenge for architects. When they design buildings and communities for sustainability, it needs to be tailored to local situations. There's an opportunity for organizations like us to work closely," he says.

Vallance says the RIBA had a long-standing relationship with the Architectural Society of China and looks forward to deepening relationships with more societies in China.

He believes there is tremendous potential for the Chinese architecture sector. He says UK architects have been designing buildings in China, but this direction could change as more Chinese architects establish global reputations.

"China has done well in fields like robotics, the adoption of technology and urban planning through better digital products. We've seen some fantastic examples where Chinese architects have adopted digital technology in their practice, such as virtual reality and cloud computing."

He visited *hutong* (alleys) near the Forbidden City during his recent trip and was impressed by Beijing's ancient architecture.

"The RIBA has many renovation and preservation experts. The architects in China and outside China can work together on topics like heritage architecture," he says.



Xiaojingwan University in Shenzhen is one of the projects in which the members of the Royal Institute of British Architects have taken part. NIGEL YOUNG / FOR CHINA DAILY