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CURRENT STATUS OF PUBLISHING IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Yuan Qi

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The following is a report given by Yuan Qi, Vice-President of the China National Publishing Industry Trading Corporation, at the annual meeting of the Subcommittee on Chinese Materials in San Francisco on March 25, 1988. It was translated into English by Antony Marr, Yale University.

We three have come from the other shore of the Pacific Ocean bringing cordial greetings to you. We are honored to have been invited to your annual meeting and wish you great success.

My talk will be in two parts. The first is a brief introduction to publishing in the People's Republic of China. The second is about our own company.

To begin with current publishing activities in China, the total output of publications from 1949 to the end of 1987 was about 800,000 titles. In 1949, the first year of liberation, only 8,000 titles were published. For some time thereafter the figure hovered between 10,000 and 20,000 titles. Since 1979 our country has been putting emphasis on socialist modernization. All industrial activities have been increasing rapidly, and publishing is no exception. In 1979, 17,000 titles were published. In every year after 1979 we have added 4,000 to 5,000 titles to the annual total. For the last two years, the annual increase has been 7,000 titles. In 1987 total output was about 60,000 titles.

We currently publish 4,705 periodicals, of which 230 are of general interest; 791 are categorized as philosophy and social sciences; 2,437 as cultural and educational. Literature and arts account for 639, 65 are for children, and 72 are pictorials. There are 1,445 newspapers, including 79 central party or government organs; 619 provincial, autonomous regional, and special municipal papers. The breakdown of classified newspapers of central party, provincial, autonomous regional, and special municipal is as follows: general interest, 117; professional and special interests, 581; city and regional, 647; and 100 county-level papers.

At the present time there are 448 publishing houses. Beijing, being the center of publishing activity, accounts for nearly 200 publishers, all under the direction of the State Media and Publishing Office, the State Council, and various ministries, commissions, and national organizations. Shanghai, the largest city in China and historically an important publishing base, now has 34 presses. As for the other provinces, autonomous regions, and special municipalities, some have over ten presses each, the rest at least one as is the case in Tibet.

The publishing responsibilities have been divided by specialization. For instance, the People's Press in Beijing is responsible for Marxist classics, party and government documents, philosophical, historical, and economic works. The People's Literature Press concerns itself primarily with literature of the classical and modern periods, both Chinese and foreign, but also with literary history and criticism. The Chung Hwa Book Company specializes in collating and editing Chinese classics. The Science Press and the Popular Science Press are responsible for works of well-known scientists and popular scientific books respectively. Besides these, there are presses for agriculture, forestry, water resources, geology, oceanography, railroading, metallurgy, mechanical engineering, atomic energy, light industry, chemical engineering, sports, and medicine. There are also presses for specific readerships, such as young people or workers. Our
country pays special attention to the development of our children. Nationwide there are 25 presses for children. In Beijing there is also a press for the Great China Encyclopedia.

China is composed of many ethnical minorities. Our government has always paid attention to the cultural development of the minority peoples and to their reading needs. In Beijing we have a Bureau of Nationality Languages Translation and the Nationality Press. In every region with minorities there are presses that are devoted to their interests and print in their languages.

To help the sight-impaired, there is also a Press for the Blind in Beijing. Due to the expansion in the development of our educational activities, the publishing of textbooks has an important place in our industry. Currently, the annual output of textbooks for all levels of education is over 6,000 titles. There are also 66 university presses in China.

The large publishing houses each employ from three to four hundred people; the smaller one average about one hundred. Each press is made up of an editorial department, a production department, and an administrative department. Many well-known writers and scholars also work as editors or executives in the publishing industry. Each press has close contacts with many experts and scholars, but actual publishing procedures are handled solely by each press.

The rapid development of publishing in China is mainly due to the fact that our government has clearly set forth the basic responsibilities of the industry. Each press tries to communicate, to accumulate scientific and cultural knowledge, and to satisfy the needs of the people in their cultural life. Therefore the selection of topics to publish includes every category of learning, according to all the levels of readers' needs. The emphasis is on a systematic approach--to fill the gaps, to accumulate intellectual knowledge, and to include all styles and schools, both popular or academic.

1. The expansion of subject coverage

Some heretofore neglected fields like philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, sociology, ethics, and religious studies now are covered either by scholarly or popular titles. Several disciplines have experienced tremendous growth in recent years. There were, for example, forty new titles in psychology in one year, including: "The Critique of Marxism Toward Psychology," "General Psychology," "The Theory and Practice of Psychology," "Adolescent Psychology Advice," "Labor Psychology," "Administrative Psychology," "Psychology of Thinking," "Marriage Psychology," as well as dictionaries of psychology, biographies of psychologists, etc. These may not all be top-notch writing, some may even contain mistakes but, as a whole, they show the marked expansion taking place in one subject field.

2. The very important place of publications in our socialist construction

In coordination with our Four Modernizations, we have published a large number of titles on economics and management. Each month between 120 and 130 titles come out. One-thousand five-hundred titles are published in a year that range from specialized treatises to popular titles. To assist in promoting law and order, 350 law books have been printed in just the last 12 months. Science and technology, both theoretical and applied, are well covered. In step with the "spark plan," various scientific and technical reading materials are scheduled to be issued in stages.

For a period of time after the downfall of the "Gang of Four," popular political titles were neglected. Now this situation is being rectified. Political educational titles for the last 21 months

3. A firm policy of promoting Marxism and Mao thought

The change from the old mold of publishing does not mean that we are easing up putting less emphasis on Marxism and Mao thought. Not only have we continued to publish Marxist classics, Mao's works, and other titles on Marxism, but we have also published "Selections From Deng Xiaoping" and other books by senior proletarian revolutionaries.

4. New publication of large serial sets


5. The collating of classics is off to a good start

Chinese civilization has a long history. In order to carry on this precious heritage our government has, since Liberation, paid special attention to collating our classics. The State Council has established special leadership groups for collating and editing the classics. Currently, the first-stage plan is being implemented. This plan calls for the publication of 3,000 important classics selected by the leadership group and 3,000 more selected by regional groups. At the same time, the collating and editing of medical, agricultural, and ethnic classics are also proceeding. These will be published in later stages of the program.

6. The establishment of "self-funded publishing"

In recent years some presses have begun printing certain types of books funded by their authors. Shanghai experimented with this "self-funded publishing" first. The first "vanity press" was established there; Beijing and other cities have followed. This has opened a new channel for the publication of manuscripts not likely to be considered by the regular press. The publishing industry in the last few years has made considerable progress, but this is only the beginning. Currently, the speed of turning out a book is still too slow; the quality of printing is still not high. But we are facing up to these problems which must be rectified if we are to attain greater progress.
Now an introduction to the China National Publishing Industry Trading Corporation. Our company was established in 1981, the first year of our sixth five-year plan. All industries under the policy of "open to the outside world, more flexibility in internal trade" have made great strides and the publishing industry is no exception. Many provincial and city presses have raised the clarion call, "Firmly plant roots locally, keep in view the whole country, move toward the world." CNTPTC was created in response to these imperatives.

The staff of CNPITC, cherishing common ideals, has, after seven years of arduous struggle, made our company the window facing the world for the Chinese publishing industry—the bridge linking us with overseas publishers, the channel for exporting and importing. Our company is a new multifunctional and strongly foreign trade enterprise. For seven years we have been operating under the guideline of "publications are the main line while trading in other lines too." Publications are our main line of business. The company operates under the direction of the State Media and Publishing Office as the general export outlet of Chinese publications. Currently, we have sources all over the country and customers from every continent. We attach equal importance to wholesaling to foreign retailers and to supplying foreign library communities. Our customers now include the Library of Congress, Deutsche Bibliothek in Frankfurt, and Kungliga Biblioteket in Stockholm as well as over one hundred other well-known public and academic libraries. We are now sending to our customers by air mail on a regular basis free catalogs for new and forthcoming books. Libraries, individuals, and retailers may place orders title by title for the items listed in our catalogs by stating quantity, catalog number, and publisher. You may acquire titles on blanket orders within the subject categories that constitute your collection. We will automatically select and supply titles based on your specifications. Standing orders are taken for multiple-volume sets and for titles which are published regularly. We also stock important and valuable books for our customers that can be shipped immediately. Yearly we export about 20,000 titles. In 1987 alone we exported 25,000 books and over 2,000 periodicals. We handle any unrestricted publications not handled by the regular press and any unrestricted periodical not handled by the Chinese Post Office.

We have held or taken part in many book exhibitions in various countries. We are regulars at the Frankfort Book Fair, the Moscow Book Fair, etc. Through this type of contact we have established many channels of communication to further develop our book exporting.

From the beginning, we have put emphasis on acting as the agent for foreign publishers as well as promoting publishing ourselves. Many publishers have found out through their contact with us that we are prompt in supplying information, that inquiries are handled with careful attention and enthusiasm, and that our prices are fair and reasonable.

In the exporting of painting and calligraphy to foreign markets, we have become more active in recent years. Every year we sponsor about seven or eight calligraphy and painting exhibitions overseas.

Audiovisual materials, musical instruments including the piano, stage costumes and props, and stage lighting equipment are all part of our exporting and importing business. We also import and export printing equipment, instruments, and materials as well as providing printing and bookbinding services.

We are suppliers of cultural materials to all our diplomatic missions abroad. For seven years, as directed by the Ministry of Culture and the State Education Commission, we have been supplying our diplomatic missions with books and handicraft articles to enable foreign friends to understand China better and to induce more overseas Chinese to think more earnestly about their motherland.
To better promote foreign trade in publishing, we have set up branches in Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou, Xiamen, Hangzhou, Jinan, Harbin, and Chongqing. More branches are being planned.

Seven years is a short time for a foreign trade enterprise. We have many shortcomings. For instance, we still do not have enough variety in our publications, our shipping is not as timely as it should be, our service is still not up to par. We can expect many more difficulties in our progress forward. But if we look squarely at our weaknesses, listen to our customers' criticism with an open mind, and correct our mistakes earnestly, we are confident that we will succeed in improving our foreign trade.

On this trip, we are going to visit some libraries, call on some old friends, get acquainted with new friends, familiarize ourselves with the procedures and requirements of your libraries, and listen to your ideas and criticism on our work so we may make improvements in our services.