

Mr. Wang Chen's meeting with SOPA Delegates

November 20, 2009

On November 20 morning at the State Council Information Office (SCIO), Minister Mr. Wang Chen met with the delegates of the Society of Publishers in Asia (SOPA) led by SOPA Chairman, Mr. Terence Tung.

Mr. Wang Chen welcomed the visit of the SOPA delegates and congratulated on the success of the "SOPA Media Summit" in Beijing. He noted that the "SOPA Media Summit" provides a platform for publishing executives from around the globe to better understand the publishing industry of China. He took this opportunity to introduce how China's publishing industry works with foreign companies.

Mr. Wang said: "Currently there are 579 publishers, 1,943 newspapers and 9,549 magazines in China, which can be dubbed a big but not gigantic country for publishing. SCIO's main responsibility is to convey true picture of China. Coordinating publishing matters is very important. Every year, around 1,500 foreign language books and over 50 foreign publications make a debut in China. They are mainly launched by 'China Daily', 'Chinese Foreign Language Bureau' and 'China Intercontinental Press', all under SCIO. The China government strives to foster dialogs between Chinese and foreign media and publishing industries. President Hu Jintao delivered an important speech in the 'World Media Summit' on October 9. Exchange and collaboration between Chinese and foreign publishing industries have become increasingly vibrant, for instance, the 'Global Chinese Media Forum' in Shanghai, the 'Beijing International Book Fair', and participation in the 'Frankfurt Book Fair' this year. Since 1993, 'China Daily' has allied with 'Washington Post' to offer a dedicated section on China as an attachment. The circulation of each issue reaches several hundreds of thousands. On September 30, 2009, the 60th Anniversary of the People's Republic of China, British-based 'The Daily Telegraph' published a congratulatory special with the aid from SCIO. The special issue covered articles by Premier Wen Jiabao, Minister of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi and myself to present to foreign readers the latest developments of China. We received very good responses from readers."

Regarding China publishing industry's collaboration with its foreign counterparts, Mr. Wang remarked that foreign collaboration of Chinese books takes place in the form of physical export, copyright trade, co-publishing and direct publishing in territories outside China. To further promote Chinese books, SCIO initiated the "Promotional Plan of Chinese Books in Foreign Countries" in 2006. By means of subsidized translation fees, the plan aimed at motivating foreign publishers to translate and publish books with Chinese themes, allowing people from around the world to better understand China in their own languages. As of end 2008, the plan yielded 990 subsidized publishing agreements with 156 publishers from 36 countries, involving 1,381 books in 21 languages. This year, we launched the "Translation of Chinese Cultural Work Project", which offered subsidies to national and foreign publishers for foreign language translation of culture, literature, technology, national affairs that have high academic value and social impact, and reflect the history and real situation of China. So far SCIO have subsidized the publication of some 100 books in 8 series. The amount of subsidy goes beyond several million U.S. dollars. Among the publications, the masterpiece "History of Chinese Civilization" is the result of collective efforts by dozens of professors from the Beijing University. It will be translated into English by a U.S. team and published by the Cambridge University Press.

“Thanks to the collective efforts of China’s publishing industry, the trade deficit between Chinese and foreign publishing trade has been dwindling in recent years with the ratio of copyright imports to copyright exports lowered from 15:1 in 1999 to 5:1. Due to the impact of economic crisis in 2008, the amount of imported books increased slightly and this ratio showed a growing trend again. In the Frankfurt Book Fair this year, the amount of copyright exports topped 2417, 300 of which originated from the Chinese Foreign Language Bureau. This indicates that China is on its way to become a big publishing nation. After 30 years of reform and open policies, China has seen robust economic growth and rising international status. However China is yet to become a superpower in publishing. China’s publishing industry imports more than exports - I would term this phenomenon as ‘deficit’. The extent of international communications of Chinese media is not strong, while western media account for 80% of the current information dissemination - relatively strong western nations and weak China in this regard. The China government hopes that local media industry will flourish in pace with the speedy growth of the economy and international status. We would cordially invite today’s SOPA guests to strengthen their exchange and cooperation among each other. Through books, newspapers and magazines, people can get to know a truthful and dynamic China, and in doing so make a significant contribution to the development of China's publishing industry. We are willing to offer support and assistance to all of you,” added Mr. Wang.

In answering the enquiries from SOPA delegates, Wang mentioned that collaborations between Chinese and foreign publishing industries are two-way. At present the SCIO’s main task is to capitalize on the advanced experience of foreign media, seize the opportunity of China fever and publish books with Chinese themes in foreign countries so as to facilitate the entry of books with Chinese themes into the mainstream foreign market. The Chinese Foreign Language Bureau established branch offices in countries such as Germany, Britain and France, where they hired local employees and recorded profits in marketing books with Chinese themes locally. This is a great beginning of localized development of China's publishing industry abroad. Overall, China adopts an open attitude towards media. Foreign journalists enjoy press freedom, foreign newspapers are available in hotels and other related locations. The pace of opening up the news media industry is gradual. Most foreign media are friendly to China and are encouraged to reinforce their cooperation with China and gear towards the goal of growth. Certain foreign media that distort facts and tarnish the image of China are prohibited from entering into China as they the process of reform is not to be undermined.

Mr. Terence Tung, SOPA Chairman, thanked the State Council Information Office for their tremendous support for the “SOPA Media Summit”. He noted that the summit seeks to cement exchange between Asian media with the rest of the world. Participants of the summit include media leaders from the U.S., Britain, France, Singapore, India, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Mr. Tung hoped that with SCIO’s support, SOPA can contribute to strengthening China’s position in the arena of international communications.

Mr. Jiang Weiqiang and Mr. Wu Wei also attended the meeting.