Peer Review:

Thirty-year Reform and Opening-up of China’s Publishing Industry

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Abstract
The year 1978 was a turning point in the history of the publishing industry in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Since then it has undergone a thorough transformation and has achieved notable progress in at least four aspects, namely innovations in the administrative system on a macro level, the evolvement of publishing houses’ operation, the more global orientation of Chinese publishing, and various developments in copyright protection. The Chinese government in 1978 formulated the policy of “Reform and Opening-up”. Since then the Chinese publishing industry has undergone a thorough transformation, involving changes in the administrative system, publishing philosophy, business operations and such like. As a result, the industry has not only come to play an increasingly important role in Chinese intellectual life, but has also become a major sector in the national economy. In this article we will review a number of recent developments in the Chinese publishing industry, namely innovations in the macro-administrative system, the evolvement of publishing houses’ operation, the internationalisation of the publishing industry, and developments in copyright protection.

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1 Innovations in macro-administration system

Because of its obvious ideological nature, the publishing industry's transformation started later than many other industries and progressed more incrementally. The reform, initiated in 1978 did not touch any system-level issues until 2002.

1.1 Both administrative ranks and power enhanced

In 1982, the National People's Congress (NPC) passed a resolution to reduce 100 State Council organs to 61, and the State Bureau of Publication was incorporated into the Ministry of Culture. Then the subordinate provincial and local publication bureaus were either cancelled, combined with the provincial and local cultural bureaus, or transformed into provincial presses. The official ranking of publication administrations was lowered and their administrative powers were weakened. For the purpose of strengthening the administration and control of publication, the Bureau was brought back under the State Council's administration in 1986, and was reconstructed into the Administration of Press and Publication (APP) in the next year. In 2001, it was given greater powers and was renamed as the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP). Soon after, a four-level administrative system, namely national-provincial-municipal-county, came into effect. By 2002, all provincial regions, 71 municipalities and over 100 counties had established different levels of press and publication administrations to supervise local publishing practices.

1.2 Service-oriented governments established

Because of their historical origins, the administrative organisations in charge of publishing in China not only performed administrative functions on behalf of governments, but also undertook specific publishing tasks as producers and operators, which resulted in their dual roles of "referees" and active "players". The merge of the administrative organs with the local presses that occurred in the 1980s blurred the line between government and enterprise further.

In 1992, the central government decided that China should switch from a planned economy to a market economy, which meant that the government's functions should be transformed fundamentally. In the publishing domain, the necessity to disconnect the APP and its subordinate organs from publishing business operations came to be generally recognised. The National Congress in 2002 reaffirmed the policy. The GAPP began to implement a new reform, which aimed to separate governments from enterprises as well as to separate administrative from operational tasks. By 2003, 16 units (mainly large publishing houses) had broken away from the GAPP, and all press and publication bureaus at the provincial level had severed connections with their subordinate press and publication enterprises. A new macro-administrative system of publication has been gradually established since then. The work focus of administrative departments of press and publication at different levels has shifted to improving macro-regulation, devolving central administrative and supervisory powers, carrying out legal administrative functions, and providing better public services.

1.3 Transition from direct interference to indirect regulation

Because of the ideological nature of publishing as well as the planned economy, historically the government tended to control almost all operations of publishing houses, printing houses and bookstores. Most daily business decisions, such as how many titles a publishing house should publish each year, which printing plant and what kind of booksellers should be chosen, the retail prices of publications, and so on were all made by the government at various levels. As socialist cultural enterprises instead of for-profit businesses, the state-owned and state-run publishing enterprises had neither any incentive to make money nor any motivation to avert bankruptcy. Low efficiency was inevitable. Consequently it was difficult to find enough books, magazines and newspapers to read during the 1960s to early 1980s. So in 1978, it was decided to stimulate publishing enterprises' enthusiasm for doing business.

Bookstores and printing plants, being of a less ideological nature, became the pioneers of this reform. With the successive issues of the Proposal for Developing Collective and Private Bookstores, the Report on Book Distribution System Reform and