



# Recommendations for Authors Publishing in China

The Chinese government runs an extensive censorship system that applies to a wide range of topics and includes translated works by foreign authors. This censorship system violates Chinese citizens' rights to free expression and to access to information, and is a key part of the government's effort to enforce ideological conformity, counter dissent and suppress knowledge within China of major human rights violations like the deadly military crackdown against the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. However, there are also thoughtful and well-informed writers who believe that, in some cases, accepting cuts or changes to their work is a valid compromise necessary to enable readers in mainland China to access a broader range of material.

Whether or not to accept censorship is a decision of conscience. PEN American Center has provided the following recommendations to help authors navigating the publication process to make informed, conscientious decisions about whether to accept proposed censorship of their work.

## IS YOUR BOOK LIKELY TO BE CENSORED?

Does the book include content that the Chinese government is known to frequently censor, such as material relating to:

- Taiwan
- Tibet
- The Tiananmen Square protests and military crackdown
- The Great Famine
- Human rights issues in China and/or Chinese activists
- Political or religious dissidents (ex. Dalai Lama, Liu Xiaobo)
- Religious and ethnic minorities (ex. Falun Gong, Uyghurs, Muslims)
- Criticism of the Communist Party of China or past or present Party leaders
- LGBTQI issues

## ENGAGING WITH A CHINESE PUBLISHER ON CENSORSHIP

Authors, publishers, editors, and agents can engage with the Chinese publisher about possible censorship. The earlier concerns about censorship are raised, the better—when it is clearly communicated that this is a priority of the author, Chinese publishers have an incentive to be candid about potential censorship so that they do not invest in a deal that will later fall through:

- Raise concerns about possible censorship before a publishing contract is concluded, asking for editors to indicate the degree and nature of cuts they can anticipate.
- Ensure that the contract with the Chinese publisher includes an agreement that the author must approve any and all cuts or alterations to the text in advance of publication.

Insist upon reviewing all proposed changes line-by-line.

- Engage with the Chinese publisher or sub-rights agent to ensure that a qualified and competent translator is hired and knows that the author must approve any changes to the text.
- Engage an objective, expert third-party translator to vet the completed translation—paying particular attention to sections of the book that include sensitive topics—to ensure that no unauthorized alterations have been made.
- If cuts or alterations are proposed, negotiate with the publisher to ensure that as much of the book's original content is retained as possible.

## DECIDING WHETHER TO ACCEPT PROPOSED CUTS

PEN recommends that the author resist censorship that:

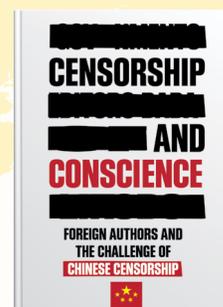
- Fundamentally alters the book's overall arguments, narrative, and/or structure, or fundamentally diminishes the book's literary merit;
- Deletes or distorts to a significant degree references to major historical, political, and human rights concerns; or
- Advances propaganda objectives of the Chinese government.

## IF YOU AGREE TO CUTS OR CHANGES TO THE TEXT

Authors who decide to accept certain cuts or changes to their work can take a number of measures to make available to Chinese readers the material that was cut from their work and

to increase awareness of censorship in China:

- Insist that the Chinese edition include a prefatory note indicating that the book has been altered or abridged, and, if possible, also indicate within the text where it has been altered or abridged.
- Post the deleted sections online in English and Chinese.
- Pursue an uncensored publication in Hong Kong or Taiwan.
- Draw attention to the censorship on the book's webpage, your own website, and in publication-related publicity so that Chinese censorship does not continue in silence.
- Inform PEN about the process and outcome, so that the organization can continue to track and report on Chinese censorship of foreign writers.
- Write an article, an op-ed, or a piece for your own website describing your decision to agree to certain cuts or changes. This helps call further attention to China's censorship regime and gives more information to mainland Chinese readers regarding the changes made to the text.



PEN's report *Censorship and Conscience: Foreign Authors and the Challenge of Chinese Censorship*, explores these issues in more detail and is available online: [pen.org/censorship-and-conscience](http://pen.org/censorship-and-conscience).