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**FOREIGN AUTHORS AND  
THE CHALLENGE OF  
CHINESE CENSORSHIP**



**CENSORSHIP AND CONSCIENCE: FOREIGN AUTHORS  
AND THE CHALLENGE OF CHINESE CENSORSHIP**

May 20, 2015

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PEN American Center is the largest branch of the world's leading literary and human rights organization. PEN works in more than 100 countries to protect free expression and to defend writers and journalists who are imprisoned, threatened, persecuted, or attacked in the course of their profession. PEN America's 4,000 members stand together with more than 20,000 PEN writers worldwide in international literary fellowship to carry on the achievements of such past members as James Baldwin, Robert Frost, Allen Ginsberg, Langston Hughes, Arthur Miller, Eugene O'Neill, Susan Sontag, and John Steinbeck. For more information, please visit [www.pen.org](http://www.pen.org).

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# INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the Chinese government censors books, movies, music, news, internet writing, and other content, and even considers this practice a source of pride. The government believes censorship helps guide public opinion and is crucial to maintaining domestic stability. For the Chinese book industry, this means publishers are on alert to weed out any “objectionable” content, including references to controversial Chinese historical details, Chinese politics, details about Chinese leaders, sexually explicit material and, in some instances, material relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues. Such book censorship in China is nearly always carried out preemptively by publishers, not by officials, and is done to avoid government reprisals post-publication.

In this report, PEN American Center (PEN) examines how foreign authors in particular are navigating the heavily censored Chinese book industry. China is one of the largest book publishing markets in the world, with total revenue projected to exceed \$16 billion in 2015 and a growth rate of roughly 10% per year.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese are buying more books and have a growing hunger for works by foreign authors. In 2013, China’s retail book sales topped \$8.2 billion, a ten percent increase from 2012.<sup>2</sup> Translated works account for a small but growing portion of that total. Chinese publishers acquired 16,115 foreign titles in 2012, a jump of more than 60 percent from 2004 when the rights to just over 10,000 were bought.<sup>3</sup> American and British books are among the most popular.

Chinese demand for foreign books in translation is growing and has made China an increasingly important market for authors and publishers around the world. As book advances and royalties payments rise in China, more foreign authors will be drawn to the publishing market there. There are serious concerns about the kinds of compromises they may confront in the process, and the impact of these compromises on free expression. Yet little is known about the true scope of China’s censorship and the options available to foreign authors navigating the translation and publication process.

*As book advances and royalties payments rise in China, more foreign authors will be drawn to the publishing market there. There are serious concerns about the kinds of compromises they may confront in the process.*

Books that deal directly and heavily with politically sensitive topics such as the Tiananmen Square massacre, Tibet, and Taiwan are almost inevitably censored, but works of poetry, fiction, memoir, and even self-help texts are not safe from the editor’s scalpel in China. PEN’s research found that in many instances, foreign authors—and their agents and publishers—do not have sufficient knowledge of the workings of Chinese censorship to do all they can to ensure that their books are not censored or to minimize censorship. Many have signed contracts that promise the preservation of the author’s original content but then leave the translation to the Chinese publisher and fail to vet the resulting copy, leaving their material vulnerable to undetected censorship. Some writers allow the details of their foreign rights agreements to be worked out by their agents or publishers, who may neither challenge cuts to the Chinese edition nor raise the matter with their client. Often the writer is never consulted about

the censorship of their work and is completely unaware of it.

For other authors, the process is far more transparent. The writer is offered a deal with a Chinese publisher but is told that certain content will have to come out of the book. PEN found that some authors may be unnecessarily quick to agree to cuts or changes requested by Chinese publishers, unaware that they have the power to push back and negotiate, and that other foreign authors have done so successfully. Others do negotiate, but still face an agonizing choice regarding whether or not to tolerate cuts upon which their Chinese publisher will not yield. The writers PEN interviewed are divided on the question of whether foreign authors should accept any cuts or changes to their work. Some argue that getting new ideas into China, even if they are in a diluted or distorted form, will help advance the cause of free expression in China and affords Chinese readers the ability to access a wide array of reading material and viewpoints that would otherwise be inaccessible. Others say that agreeing to Chinese censorship, particularly since a foreign author has the choice not to, emboldens and encourages the censorship regime that is not optional for Chinese writers, and further limits freedom of expression in China.

We also sought the perspectives of Chinese writers, translators, and publishers, many of whom are reluctant participants in China's censorship system. Like their foreign counterparts, their views varied. Many of them emphasized foreign authors' duty to check whether their work is being censored, and identified certain topical areas where they do not think authors should compromise and accept censorship lest they play directly into the hands of Chinese political repression. They also suggested alternative measures that foreign authors could take, such as including notes within the translated text to indicate that it has been censored, posting censored material online, and publishing in Taiwan or Hong Kong rather than on the mainland. Taiwan and Hong Kong are not currently subject to the same kinds of editorial restrictions as the mainland, and some translated books that cannot be released in China are published and sold there.

The Chinese government's censorship system violates its citizens' human rights to free expression and access to information, and is a key part of the government's efforts to suppress knowledge within China of major human rights violations including the deadly military crackdown against the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 and the persecution of political dissidents.<sup>4</sup> These efforts to suppress information are startlingly successful across China's population of 1.4 billion. Information remains tightly controlled, including on the internet, which in much of the rest of the world acts as a largely unfettered conduit for the spread of information.

On a recent trip to China and Hong Kong in January 2015, PEN delegates spoke to numerous Chinese writers and activists who remarked upon the "historical amnesia" they observed on the mainland, noting that many young people now growing up or in early adulthood have no idea that the Tiananmen violence ever took place. Agreeing to censor one's own work,

particularly if the material being censored pertains to sensitive political issues, further contributes to this enforced historical amnesia. While each writer, editor, agent, and publisher may reach an individual choice about whether to accept the censorship of a work, the collective decisions of a community and an industry carry considerable political weight. They can shape whether the Chinese government comes to regard censorship as a timebound regime that will ultimately buckle beneath the weight of globalization, or a system that it can sustain and defend in perpetuity. In addition, foreign authors have a luxury that most Chinese writers do not: the ability to refuse to comply with this system without completely sacrificing their careers or their access to an audience.

The choice of whether to accept censorship has already carried over into vexing questions of self-censorship. Hollywood film studios have in some cases invited Chinese censors onto their sets, aiming to avoid tripwires that could complicate their access to the lucrative Chinese market.<sup>5</sup> Some China-focused academics already feel that they must tailor their work to ensure that they will continue to get visas into China. How long before a wide swath of American writers begin to simply avoid taking up topics that could complicate their access to readers in China once their books are translated? As a global organization predicated on writer-to-writer solidarity, PEN must also consider the views of Chinese writers who pay the highest price for resisting and defying censorship, including life sentences in prison. We need to consider how to fulfill our duty to stand with them.

The question of whether and to what extent an author should consent to proposed censorship of his or her work is a question of conscience. As the Chinese market grows and Chinese publishers and readers become more important to foreign writers and publishers, it is essential to establish principles to ensure that growing interplay between the Chinese and the global literary communities does not result in routinized, ever-increasing, and scarcely acknowledged acceptance of censorship. On the basis of this report's findings, PEN has identified a set of core principles that foreign authors and their colleagues should take into consideration when preparing to publish in mainland China. These include assessing the likelihood that a book will be censored, working with the Chinese publisher to negotiate any proposed changes to the text, vetting the final translation to identify any unauthorized changes, and refusing to permit changes that would fundamentally alter the book's core arguments or diminish its literary merit, or that delete or distort references to major historical, political, and human rights concerns in China. PEN encourages authors, editors, publishers, agents, and translators to carefully consider these principles before entering into contracts or other arrangements that relate to publication on the mainland. To avoid being unwitting accessories to the world's most powerful and repressive censorship regime, participants in the global publishing industry must inform themselves and consider carefully the questions of conscience raised by publishing in China.

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# METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK

This report is based on interviews with dozens of authors, editors, translators, publishers, and literary agents in the United States, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Australia, and Europe about their experiences with censorship in China and their views about how to respond to it, as well as news reports and opinion pieces by writers who have grappled with this issue.

The report begins with an overview of the system of book censorship in mainland China. It then analyzes how foreign authors currently interact with that system and assesses the arguments both in favor of and against allowing one's work to be altered or censored in order for it to be published on the mainland. The report concludes with recommendations to equip foreign authors and their partners to make an informed, conscientious decision about whether or not to proceed with publication if changes to their work are foreseeable.

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# CENSORSHIP ON THE MAINLAND

## *How the Process Works*

In China, books, movies, television shows, newspapers, and social media all must adhere to strict editorial limits that are rarely spelled out in detail by authorities but are nonetheless widely understood. Chinese publishing regulations set out broad prohibited categories: any printed content that propagates evil cults, superstition, obscenity, gambling, or violence, as well as material that undermines the solidarity of the nation, disturbs public order, or destroys public stability.<sup>6</sup> There are two general categories of content that most concern China's book publishers. Li Yinhe, a Beijing writer and sexologist, described these in an interview with the *New York Review of Books*: "There are two main criteria for banning books or censoring. One is black and one is yellow. Black are political issues, like you're opposing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Yellow is sex."<sup>7</sup>

The sensitive areas most often cited by writers interviewed for this report as ripe for censorship were the "Three Ts"—Tiananmen, Tibet, and Taiwan—as well as topics related to ethnic minorities, depictions of past or present CCP leaders or Party history, or descriptions of historical events that do not comply with the official account. Other red flags for publishers are mentions of the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, the banned spiritual group Falun Gong, or political dissidents like the jailed literary critic and poet Liu Xiaobo, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010.

In many cases, the sensitive subject matter of books prevents them from even reaching the translation stage. Books like the S&M-themed *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James and *American Dervish* by Ayad Akhtar have been licensed by Chinese publishers but have since had their contracts canceled or are now languishing in pre-publication limbo, out of recognition that their content will not pass muster with the censors. Nancy Wiese, vice president of subsidiary rights for Hachette Book Group, told PEN via email that *American Dervish*, which touches on Islam, extremism, and sexuality, "had been licensed but was canceled because the book was unable to pass the approval process."<sup>8</sup> Gray Tan, the founder of the Grayhawk Agency in Taiwan, sold the rights to *Fifty Shades of Grey*, but the Chinese publisher is still sitting on the book, unsure if it can ever be released in China.<sup>9</sup>

Publishers who violate this censorship system face

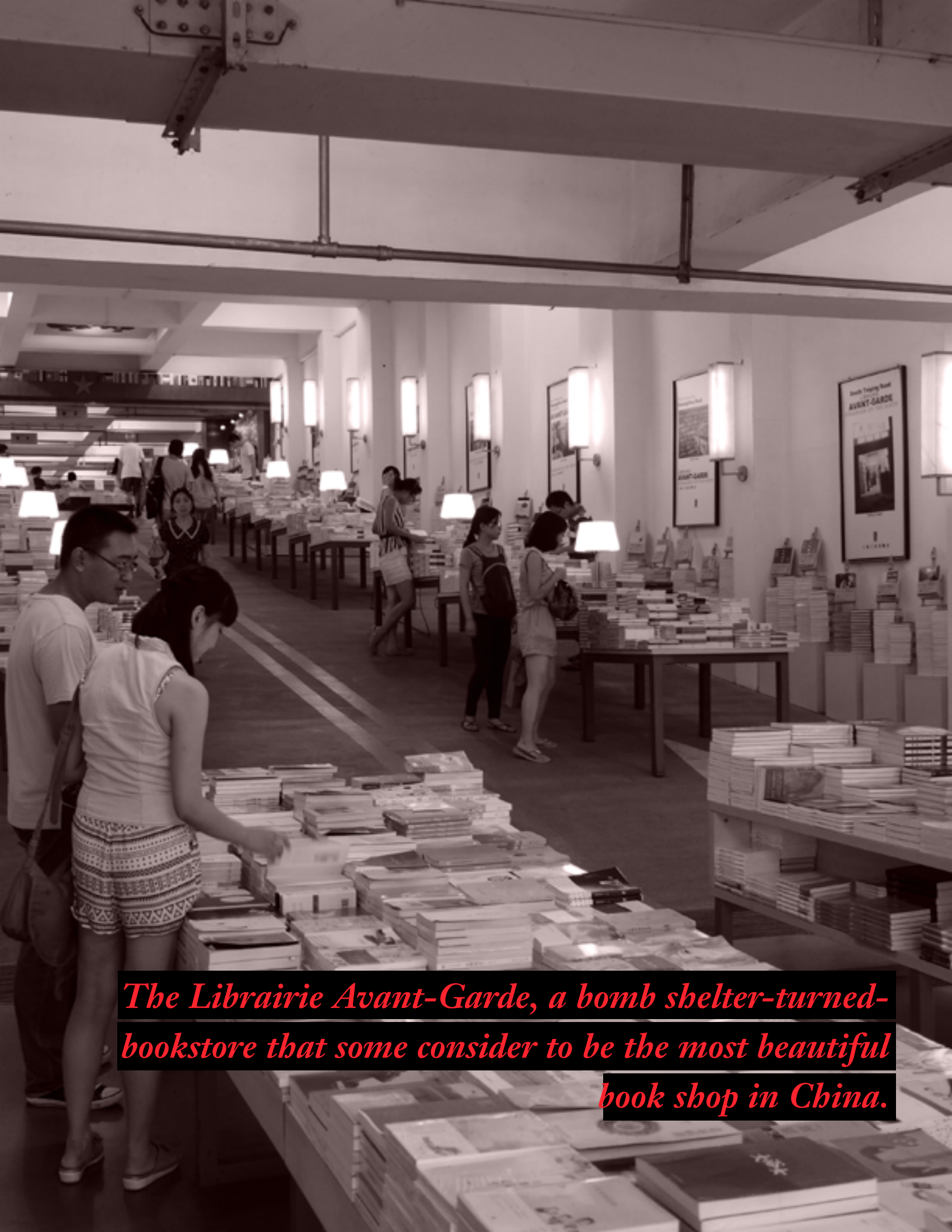
***"There are two main criteria for banning books or censoring. One is black and one is yellow. Black are political issues, like you're opposing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Yellow is sex."***

temporary business closure, permanent loss of their publishing license, and/or hefty fines. In June 2011, China forced state-run Zhuhai Publishing House to shut down after it published a memoir by Hong Kong newspaper publisher Jimmy Lai, an outspoken critic of the CCP.<sup>10</sup> According to Gray Tan, the big fear among Chinese publishers is that they will unknowingly be put on a government blacklist. "This means they will be watched more closely in the future," he said.<sup>11</sup> No publishers in China are fully independent or free to publish what they wish. Even private publishers must find a state-approved partner in order to obtain the legally required International Standard Book Numbers, or ISBNs, that are only given to a limited number of state-run publishers. China's State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television controls the distribution in China of ISBNs, and publishers may see their supply cut dramatically if they publish controversial works.<sup>12</sup> Such scrutiny and pressure could mean a slow commercial death for a publisher. These punishments are relatively rare because publishers are extremely careful. Publishing houses proactively excise sensitive words in, and sections of, books to avoid tripping the government censors' wires.



*Publishers who violate this censorship system face temporary business closure, permanent loss of their publishing license, and/or hefty fines.*





*The Librairie Avant-Garde, a bomb shelter-turned-bookstore that some consider to be the most beautiful book shop in China.*

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# IN THE DARK

## *Many Writers are Unaware of Censorship in Translated Works*

Many foreign authors interviewed by PEN did not discover that the translated edition of their work had been censored until well after its publication. In August 2014, the former U.S. poet laureate Robert Hass was invited to read his work at the Librairie Avant-Garde, a bomb shelter-turned-bookstore that some consider to be the most beautiful book shop in China.<sup>13</sup> The Saturday afternoon reading in Nanjing's university district kicked off the publication of Hass' selected poems in Chinese. Librairie Avant-Garde was sprawling, he recalled, "like seven Barnes & Nobles" and "full of hundreds of kids, reading."<sup>14</sup> Everywhere there were images of famous writers, such as Susan Sontag, Jean-Paul Sartre, Czesław Miłosz, and Gabriel García Márquez. It had the look "of a really literate, reading society,"<sup>15</sup> Hass told PEN.

Though foreign authors are increasingly receiving a warm reception in China, Hass himself had not sought publication there. He was approached by the Shanghai-listed Phoenix Publishing and Media Group, which, together with the state-run Jiangsu Literature and Arts Publishing House, released his book in August during the Shanghai Book Fair. It wasn't until his book tour that Hass discovered that the essay he had been asked to write for his Chinese readers to serve as a preface to his book had been censored by his publisher. Missing in an otherwise faithful translation of Hass' 1,800-word introduction were two sentences about how some young Americans had been drawn to Chinese poetry via sympathy for the Tiananmen Square movement and the pro-democracy protestors killed in the bloody military crackdown of June 3-4, 1989, in Beijing. These two lines have been cut completely from the text: "the end of my bookshelf ends with Tony Barstow's *Out of the Howling Storm*, a book that was read by American college students because it seemed to address the new energies that led to Tienanmen (sic) Square. American students had seen students shot dead during protests during the Vietnam War and they watched the events at Tienanmen (sic) Square with intense interest and sympathy." Hass' book title was rendered into Mandarin as *Adam's Apple Orchard*, a clunky translation of his poem *The Apple Trees at Olema*.<sup>16</sup> Poor translation is a pitfall all writers face when reaching new audiences in other languages, and vetting every edition for quality and accuracy is a difficult task. But, in the case of China, writers must also be on guard against censorship.

Hass said that when he submitted the essay, the question

***"I don't know who would have moral authority or force to make a difference by refusing to be published in Chinese but I was not in that position."***

of an accurate translation did not arise. "It didn't actually occur to me to give an ultimatum," he said. "That's the only thing I would have done. I was a little thoughtless about it. I was just busy with other things and it was another literary chore."<sup>17</sup> Like many authors, Hass feels powerless as an individual to stand up to China's censorship regime. "I don't know who would have moral authority or force to make a difference by refusing to be published in Chinese but I was not in that position."<sup>18</sup>

Andrew Solomon's *The Noonday Demon* was also censored in translation without his knowledge, illustrating another area of content that draws scrutiny from censors: topics relating to LGBT issues. PEN conducted a side-by-side comparison of the original book and its mainland China edition and discovered that certain sections discussing LGBT issues, even if they did not involve sexually explicit content, had been removed from the translation. Solomon, the current president of PEN American Center, did not know that portions of his book had been cut until this comparison was done, and remarked:

"Censorship of texts without the author's knowledge is abhorrent, a violation of contract terms and of free speech, and I learned of the censorship of my own work with enormous dismay. It is a shocking betrayal of the trust writers place in their translators and foreign publishers. It is critical that authors and publishers know

I had a rough time in connection with my sexuality and went through difficulties familiar to many gay men. There were no problems, to the best of my recollection, until I was seven years old. But in second grade, the tortures began. I was clumsy and unathletic; I wore glasses; I was not interested in spectator sports; I had my nose forever in a book; I formed friendships most easily with girls. I had an age-inappropriate fondness for opera. I was fascinated by glamour. I was shunned by many of my schoolmates. When I went to sleep-away camp the summer I was ten, I was teased and tormented and regularly called a faggot—a word that bewildered me as I had not formulated sexual desires of any kind to myself. By the time I was in seventh grade, the problem had become broader. At school, the watchful eye of a liberal faculty offered some protection, and I was just odd and unpopular: too academic, too uncoordinated, too artistic. On the school bus, however, brutality reigned. I can remember sitting rigidly still there, next to a blind girl with whom I'd made friends, while the entire bus chanted abuse at me, stomping their feet to the rhythm of their invective. I was an object not only of derision but also of an intense hatred that confused me as much as it pained me. This horrible period did not last very long; by the time I was in ninth grade, it had all abated, and I was not unpopular (at school or, indeed, on the bus) by my senior year. But I had learned too much about abhorrence and too much about fear, and I was never again to be free of them.

Within my family, I knew from the start that homosexuality was not going to be well tolerated. In fourth grade, I was taken to a psychiatrist and years later my mother said she had asked him whether I was gay; he apparently said that I was not. The interest of the episode, for me, lies in my mother's having had intense concern already in my prepubescence about my possible sexual identification. I am sure that the benighted therapist would have received a commission in short order to straight out the problem of my sexuality had he assessed it more accurately. I never told my family about the taunts at camp or at school; eventually someone told his mother about what happened on the school bus every day and his mother told my mother, who wanted to know why I hadn't said anything to her. How could I?



Some of the text excised from the Chinese translation of Andrew Solomon's *The Noonday Demon*.

*Apart from Auster, Shanghai 99 publishes a broad range of other, mostly American, authors, including Saul Bellow, Raymond Carver, Nathan Englander, Joyce Carol Oates, and Philip Roth. Peng said he cannot recall ever having to censor any other books. But in this case, he felt he had no choice. “It was self-protection,” he said.*

what is going on, and that they take steps to resolve censorship issues on a case-by-case, page-by-page basis. My book *Far from the Tree* also deals with gay issues, and I will press the publisher very hard not to censor the text as we prepare for publication in China. I will have the translation vetted. I’m older and wiser than I was when *The Noonday Demon* was published there. I hope this report will make everyone else wiser, too.”

The American novelist Paul Auster, who has a wide readership in China, also did not discover the changes made to the Chinese translation of his book *Sunset Park* until after the book’s publication. The plight of writer and dissident Liu Xiaobo is a minor plot point in the book, which was published in China in November 2014.<sup>19</sup> The publisher, Shanghai 99 Readers, cut several pages describing Liu and his situation. In several other places, mentions of the dissident’s name were replaced by “L.” References to China were replaced by “Country C.” Auster told PEN that he never signed off on the changes and feels his book was “mutilated.” “Some limbs have been chopped off,” Auster said.<sup>20</sup>

Peng Lun, the deputy editor of Shanghai 99, told PEN that he communicated with Auster before publication via a Chinese journalist based in New York because Auster does not use a computer or email.<sup>21</sup> The journalist, Daisy Jing, said she told Auster about the changes prior to publication and he agreed.<sup>22</sup> Auster denies this. Peng said he should have sent an email confirming the alleged agreement from Auster to the writer’s U.S. agent Carol Mann and his co-agent for rights in Asia, the Big Apple Agency in Honolulu, but did not do so. “I didn’t send that email,” Peng said. “It was actually my fault.”<sup>23</sup>

Peng does not deny making the changes. A failure to do so, he said, could have meant the closure of his business and the closure of his state-run publishing partner, Zhejiang Literature and Arts Publishing House. Apart from Auster, Shanghai 99 publishes a broad range of other, mostly American, authors, including Saul Bellow, Raymond Carver, Nathan Englander, Joyce Carol Oates, and Philip Roth. Peng said he cannot recall

ever having to censor any other books. But in this case, he felt he had no choice. “It was self-protection,” he said. If he had not taken the sections about Liu out, his state-run partner would have. “I also feel it’s regrettable when historical facts are censored,” he said. “There’s nothing we can do.”<sup>24</sup>

In other cases, a writer’s U.S. agent may agree to allow cuts to the Chinese translation without consulting the writer. In an industry adjusting to the financial impact of the digital publishing revolution, writers, agents, and publishers alike are highly motivated to find new sources of income, including subsidiary rights deals in China and elsewhere. Harvey Klinger of the Harvey Klinger Agency in New York City says he sees the earnings from foreign rights sales as “found money” that brings “exposure that the author wouldn’t be getting otherwise.”<sup>25</sup> One of his writers, the American columnist and self-help author Barbara De Angelis, has seen her books take off in China. “Right now, she’s selling better in China than anywhere,” Klinger said. However, the process has not been without its problems. Klinger said that about 30 percent of De Angelis’ *Secrets About Men Every Woman Should Know* was removed because her Chinese publisher, Commonwealth, found the sections dealing with bedroom secrets and advice too sexually explicit. “The universe over there is ‘No sex please, we’re Chinese,’” Klinger said. When Commonwealth asked for the deletions, Klinger said he went along with it because De Angelis was developing a very large Chinese following and the royalty checks were a welcome surprise.<sup>26</sup>

De Angelis herself was amazed to learn from PEN that her book had been modified for Chinese readers. “I did not know they were cutting things out,” she said.<sup>27</sup> De Angelis said that she trusts her foreign agents to represent her in negotiations with overseas publishers and even to make decisions about editorial changes as they see fit. If she had known in advance, she probably would have approved the cuts anyway. “Some wisdom is better than no wisdom. Some guidance is better than no guidance,” De Angelis said. “They can’t censor the love, the intention, the offering of wisdom and my energetic vibrational voice in the book.”<sup>28</sup>

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# NO ONE IS CHECKING

## *Undetected Censorship in Chinese Translations*

For other foreign writers, the censorship of their Chinese editions happened during translation and neither they nor their agents were informed of changes. Publishers around the world, including those in China, usually promise they will not change anything in a book they have licensed without first seeking the writer's approval. They promise a "faithful translation of the original work," and that "no modification of the work will occur without it being mutually agreed upon," or similar language. However, if a writer leaves the translation of their work to their Chinese publisher and does not vet the text, they may end up with a very different Mandarin version of their book, even if their contract says no changes should be made without the author's approval. Interviews with numerous foreign authors who have published in China revealed that some only discovered changes after the fact. Often the revisions involved political content. When an American journalist (who asked to remain anonymous for fear that speaking out would jeopardize his mainland publishing deal) toured China to publicize his book, he was disappointed to discover that a reference to a quote from the Dalai Lama had been excised from his book.<sup>29</sup> The quote remained, but it was no longer attributed to the exiled spiritual leader. Over dinner with his translator, the writer was told that a Chinese state-run publisher could not print the words of an enemy of the state. So instead of the words appearing as a quote, they read as if the journalist had said the words himself, resulting in an unintentional form of plagiarism.

Evan Osnos, a writer for *The New Yorker*, said authors should know better than to put their heads in the sand when they publish in China or any other country with a widely documented system of censoring published material. "Anybody who is writing a book these days has at least the ability, and the responsibility too, to know what it means if their book is going to be published in Chinese," he said.<sup>30</sup>

Jo Lusby, managing director of Penguin China, said her team in Beijing checks the Chinese translations of Penguin books sold in China, but she admits they are unusual in doing so.<sup>31</sup> She said not all missing passages in Chinese translations are related to censorship. Sometimes omissions are simply a result of bad translation. "Translators may leave something out in China because it's just hard and they couldn't really work out how to do it so they just skipped it. Or there's bits that people will find culturally distasteful in a story and they'll

decide it is not substantive to the story and it might turn the stomachs of readers here, so they'll skip it."<sup>32</sup> Whatever the reason for changes to the text, such omissions or tweaks likely occur frequently.

"Publishers internationally are not checking," Lusby said. "That's not really a China situation. Publishing is in many ways a gentleman's industry still, and the way these things are run, a lot of it is on a handshake." Lusby said that publishers tend not to second guess each other and want to be able to "trust people to make their own decisions for their own markets."<sup>33</sup>

However, since Chinese censorship is a well-known phenomenon, hiring someone to go over the English and Chinese versions of a book would seem like excellent insurance against both bad translation and quiet censorship. But, though vetting costs are modest, ensuring the vetting of all translated manuscripts that contain sensitive content will require a change of approach by the industry. "In an industry perpetually short of money, that doesn't sound cost-effective to me," said Cecile Barendsma, director of foreign rights for Janklow & Nesbit Associates, a literary agency with offices in New York and London.<sup>34</sup> John Oakes of OR Books cited the costs of adding an extra layer of vetting to the foreign publication process for small publishers: "If a book breaks even, everyone heaves a sigh of relief. If it makes money, they are celebrating... They don't have the money to spend on reviewing books that are translated... the financial muscle power isn't there."<sup>35</sup>

However, while larger publishers are scrambling to adopt new formats and distribution models, theirs is not a struggling industry. Net revenue for the U.S. publishing industry has hovered around \$27 billion per year from 2010-13, according to figures from the Association of American Publishers.<sup>36</sup> Profits have been rising, and stood at 10.7% in 2013.<sup>37</sup> In the first quarter of 2015, Bertelsmann, part owner of the world's largest publishing house, Penguin Random House, cited publishing as the primary driver of profit growth across its multi-media business.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, according to quotes from translators contacted by PEN, the cost of vetting a Chinese translation is around \$0.07 per word. If authors have noted in advance which portions of their work are likely to catch the eye of a censor in the course of translation, a targeted vetting of only those portions should not prove to be cost-prohibitive.

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# INFORMED DECISIONS

*Writers Who Agree to Censorship*

*There is “an assumption that mainland Chinese media and readers are having the wool pulled over their eyes... [but] time and time again readers on the tour asked me to be more forthcoming about what was ‘really’ cut.”*

While censorship of translated work is carried out without the author’s knowledge in some cases, in others, authors are aware of the changes being made to their work. These authors discuss the requested cuts or changes directly with their agents or their Chinese editors and publishers, and then make a decision. In explaining why they have consented to censorship in the Chinese translation, many argue that getting new ideas into China, even if they are in a distorted or denuded form, will benefit Chinese readers and ultimately help advance the cause of free expression in China.

Peter Hessler, an author who spent over a decade living in China and has written several books that were translated and published on the mainland (with some changes and cuts), argues from this point of view in a March 2015 *New Yorker* article. Hessler uses the example of his Chinese editor Zhang Jiren (who makes the primary decisions regarding which parts of his work to cut or change) to make a case for viewing some Chinese publishers and editors as allies in the fight to get information to Chinese readers, rather than adversaries:

“For an editor like Zhang, who is not a Party member, there is no ideology and no absolute list of banned

subjects. His censorship is defensive: rather than promoting an agenda or covering up some specific truth, he tries to avoid catching the eye of a higher authority. In fact, his goal—to have a book translated and published as accurately as possible—may run counter to the goals of the Party.”<sup>39</sup>

Hessler underscores the fact that Chinese publishers have sharply limited agency in dealing with the demands of the government censors, and that they are often not personally in agreement with the rules they must enforce. But the dilemma raised by Chinese censorship is not a struggle between foreign authors and these publishers, but between authors and the system of authoritarian control that dictates the rules. He aptly notes that some publishers can be allies in this struggle.

Hessler emphasizes Chinese readers’ resourcefulness in dealing with the censorship system and seeking out censored material through other means. However, Hessler also sees a limit to what authors should agree to censor. Three of his books have been published on the mainland, but a fourth, *Oracle Bones*, has not. This book “includes reporting on Uyghurs and Falun Gong, and it would be treated differently from the others, which focus mostly on the lives of average Chinese in the countryside and in small cities.”<sup>40</sup> Hessler and Zhang have mutually agreed not to attempt a mainland version of the book. As Hessler explained, “I didn’t want to publish something in which the heart of my reporting was censored, and Zhang told me that he had no interest in doing that job.” Hessler further adds that all of his books, including *Oracle Bones*, are available in Taiwan in uncensored translations.<sup>41</sup>

Mike Meyer, who accepted cuts to the Chinese version of his book *The Last Days of Old Beijing*, about the destruction of huge swathes of the capital’s ancient architecture, told PEN that it is important for foreign writers who focus on China to make their work available on the mainland, so it can be read there and so their interview subjects can hold them accountable for what they write. He believes that Chinese readers are alert to signs of the censor’s knife when they are reading. He said there is “an assumption that mainland Chinese media and readers are having the wool pulled over their eyes... [but] time and time again readers on the tour asked me to be more forthcoming about what was ‘really’ cut.”<sup>42</sup>

Former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s book *On China* was also censored when it was published in China, proving that even those who write sympathetically about the

An extended summary of the relevant exchange will give the flavor of the mood in Beijing six months after Tiananmen:

DENG: I talked with President Bush about the Fang Lizhi case.

KISSINGER: As you know, the President did not know about the invitation to the banquet until it was already public.

DENG: He told me that.

KISSINGER: Since you have raised Fang, I would like to express a consideration to you. I did not raise the issue in any of my other conversations here because I know that it is a matter of great delicacy and affects Chinese dignity. But I think your best friends in America would be relieved if some way could be found to get him out of the Embassy and let him leave the country. There is no other single step which would so impress the American public as having it happen before there is too much agitation.

At this point, Deng got up from his seat and unscrewed the microphones between his seat and mine as a symbol that he wanted to talk privately.

DENG: Can you make a suggestion?

KISSINGER: My suggestion would be that you expel him from China and we agree that as a government we will make no political use of him whatsoever. Perhaps we would encourage him to go to some country like Sweden where he would be far away from the US Congress and our press. An arrangement like this could make a deep impression on the American public, more than a move on any technical subject.

Deng wanted more specific assurances. Was it possible for the American government to “require Fang to write a confession” to crimes under Chinese law; or for Washington to guarantee that “after his expulsion [from China]... Fang will say and do nothing opposing China”? Deng broadened this to a request that Washington “undertake the responsibility that it prevent further nonsense being uttered by Fang and by [other Chinese] demonstrators” currently in the United States. Deng was looking for a way out. But the measures he proposed were outside the legal authority of the American government.

## 论中国

[美] 亨利·基辛格 著

Henry  
Kissinger  
On  
China



DENG: What would you think if we were to expel him after he has written a paper confessing to his crimes?

KISSINGER: I would be surprised if he would do this. I was at the Embassy this morning, but I did not see Fang.

DENG: But he would have to do it if the US side insists. This issue was started by people at the US Embassy including some good friends of ours and including people I thought of as friends. What if the American side required Fang to write a confession and after that we could expel him as an ordinary criminal and he can go where he wants. If this won't do, what about another idea: The US undertakes the responsibility after his expulsion that Fang will say and do nothing opposing China. He should not use the US or another country to oppose the PRC. [...]

A portion of the text cut from the Chinese edition of Kissinger's *On China*, summarizing his conversation with Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping.

country's history are not immune to censorship. Jonathan Mirsky, reviewing the original English-language edition for the UK's *Literary Review*, said he found it "intellectually disturbing" that Kissinger's book sidestepped any explanation of what led to the 1989 crackdown on democracy protestors in Beijing.<sup>43</sup> Instead Kissinger writes: "This is not the place to examine the events that led to the tragedy at Tiananmen Square; each side has different perceptions depending on the various, often conflicting, origins of their participation in the crisis."<sup>44</sup>

In the Chinese edition, the issue is elided even further. The Chinese version, published by China Citic Press in October 2012, calls what happened on Tiananmen Square an "incident," not a "tragedy." The passage reads: "This is not the place to examine the events that led to the Tiananmen incident. Each side has different perceptions depending on the various, often conflicting, origins of their participation in the crisis."

Later in the same chapter (titled *Tiananmen* in English, *America's Predicament* in Chinese), Kissinger quotes former U.S. President George H.W. Bush as saying that the United States "could not look the other way when it came to human rights or political reforms" in China. But in the mainland edition, it is only Beijing's "political reforms" that Washington cannot look away from. There is no mention of "human rights" in the sentence. Also missing are two pages of conversation between Kissinger and China's then-head of state Deng Xiaoping. The exchange occurred in Beijing about six months after the Tiananmen killings and concerned what should be done with the Chinese physicist Fang Lizhi, who had fled into the U.S. Embassy in Beijing following the crackdown on protestors. But readers of the Chinese edition will never know of this back and forth, an exchange that the historian Jonathan Spence has described as "the most intriguing" part of Kissinger's account of talking to Deng.<sup>45</sup>

Kissinger spokeswoman Jessee Leporin told PEN that prior to the publication, Kissinger informed his Chinese publisher that "his fixed policy was not to authorize any alterations or abridgements of his writing."<sup>46</sup> A few weeks before the book was to come out, however, Kissinger was informed of "some proposed modifications to the text," Leporin said in an email. Kissinger's response, Leporin said, was to inform the publisher that "he was not looking for opportunities to cause embarrassment" but that if he were asked about the discrepancies "he would make clear that no changes had been authorized." Leporin's statement added that Kissinger "respects the decisions of other authors and believes that serious people can disagree on these questions. He also believes, on balance, it has been useful to present an American view of the events in *On China* to a Chinese audience."<sup>47</sup>

Ezra Vogel, an eminent East Asian historian and Professor Emeritus at Harvard, took a similar view. The translation of his biography of Deng Xiaoping was partially censored, with his consent. Vogel remarked, "To me the choice was easy. I thought it was better to have 90 percent of the book available here [in China] than zero."<sup>48</sup>

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## ROOM FOR NEGOTIATION

Writers who have allowed censorship of their work also point out that when Chinese publishers are pressed, they sometimes compromise and reduce the amount of material marked for censorship. If they are aware that an author is sensitive to cuts they may wield the scalpel more judiciously, retaining as much content as they can while still avoiding probable reprisal.

Joseph Esherick, Professor of History and expert on China at the University of Berkeley, told PEN that he thinks foreigners should work with Chinese publishers and urge them to accept material that they might normally shy away from.<sup>49</sup> He described how the Chinese publisher of his book *Ancestral Leaves* asked him for 27 pages of deletions and revisions, and he managed to whittle that back to nine pages. Esherick also negotiated a statement in the preface indicating that parts had been deleted or changed and that the English version of the book should be regarded as authoritative.<sup>50</sup>

Esherick's book ended up at number four on the Sina.com non-fiction bestseller list, and during a press tour many Chinese reporters asked for details of what had been censored. This helped convince Esherick that it was worthwhile to engage publishers on censorship issues and to keep "pushing the envelope to its greatest possible extent."<sup>51</sup> Like Esherick, Ezra Vogel was also involved in the translation and censorship process for *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*; it took a year for his Chinese publishing house to produce a final translation. At the end, Vogel noted, "the impressive thing is how much actually got through."<sup>52</sup> Vogel is also donating all royalties from mainland sales of his book to his alma mater for the support of East Asian studies there.<sup>53</sup>

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# STANDING FIRM

## *Authors Who Refuse Censorship*

Other authors have refused to permit the alteration of their work in a Chinese translation, even if the refusal means their book cannot be published on the mainland. Evan Osnos, a writer who spent eight years covering China for *The New Yorker*, decided to forego a mainland Chinese edition of his book *Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China* because he was being asked to “revise” about a quarter of the content. In an op-ed for the *New York Times* in May 2014, he said that such a version of his book would “endorse a false image of the past and present.”<sup>54</sup> He decided to publish in Taiwan instead.

Osnos told PEN that after his op-ed came out, he received notes from other authors thanking him for speaking out about

use normal language, you have to call it an ‘incident’ or a ‘revolt’. That’s a substantive cut. If you had to refer to Selma as a revolt or an incident, that’s not accurate. We should move away from the idea of evaluating it in terms of the number of pages that are cut, or the percentage that’s cut.”<sup>56</sup>

James Kynge, a *Financial Times* journalist, expressed similar sentiments when remarking on his decision to refuse to allow a full chapter from his book *China Shakes the World* to be cut from the Chinese version, ending the deal with the Chinese publisher. Kynge told the *New York Times*, “As a journalist committed to accuracy, I felt it would be terrifically

***When Hillary Rodham Clinton’s book Living History was published in China in 2003, the author was stunned to find sections about the labor camp activist Harry Wu had been cut from the Mandarin version and demanded that the books be pulled off the shelves.***

his dilemma. Some told him that they had censored their work in order to get it published in China and had never felt good or had “felt queasy” about doing so. “Authors out there are confronting these choices on their own and there’s not really an established doctrine” on how to address the issue, Osnos said.<sup>55</sup> Some of the writers Osnos was in touch with tried to minimize instances of censorship by negotiating with their editors or by flagging the modified content for readers by inserting ellipses where words or sentences were cut. To Osnos, these are unpalatable compromises: “When a person begins to come up with these kinds of accommodations and small victories, it can distract from the fact that fundamentally it means participating in a kind of restriction of freedom that on some level I find offensive.” He also argued that authors should not evaluate the issue in terms of the quantity of material that is deleted or retained in the Chinese edition of their book:

“That’s the wrong way to look at it—*what* is being cut? If you’re referring to the Tiananmen protests, you can’t

hypocritical to waive that principle just to gain access to the Chinese marketplace.”<sup>57</sup>

When Hillary Rodham Clinton’s book *Living History* was published in China in 2003, the author was stunned to find sections about the labor camp activist Harry Wu had been cut from the Mandarin version and demanded that the books be pulled off the shelves, although her Chinese publisher argued the cuts were “minor, technical” changes.<sup>58</sup> Clinton’s U.S. publisher Simon & Schuster posted the deleted material on the web in Chinese.<sup>59</sup> Clinton’s latest book, *Hard Choices*, chronicling her tenure as U.S. Secretary of State, includes an entire chapter about the U.S.-China wrangling over the fate of human rights activist Chen Guangcheng, who fled house arrest in a rural Shandong Province village and escaped into the U.S. Embassy in Beijing in 2012. When *Hard Choices* came out in June 2014, Chinese publishers would not touch it.<sup>60</sup> Alan Greenspan also refused to allow “significant changes” to the Chinese version of his *Age of Turbulence*, and the effort to publish on the mainland was abandoned as a result.<sup>61</sup>

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## NO EASY ANSWER

*“When we lived under a regime that censored, we knew it, and we knew why certain books—or newspapers, or films, or people—didn’t say certain things...and Chinese readers would understand that I hadn’t talked about [the Great Famine] so that I could talk about the rest.”*

Deciding whether or not to comply with cuts can pose dilemmas. When Argentinian author Martín Caparrós’ 600-page non-fiction book about food scarcity, *El Hambre* (Hunger), was shopped around to Chinese publishers during the 2014 Frankfurt Book Fair, they all said the book would not work in their market because it contained two pages of background on China’s Great Famine, a man-made catastrophe that left tens of millions dead in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Gray Tan, Caparrós’ agent for Asia, suggested Caparrós cut that section, and the writer hesitantly agreed. Tan was surprised but relieved. “If the sensitive part is not a super integral part of the book, we would usually recommend (authors) take it off, because that’s the easiest thing for everyone,” said Tan. “You can argue about it, you can keep trying but that might be years and years of work without any result. But you can get 90 percent of your message through.”<sup>62</sup>

Caparrós described how the decision tormented him in a recent column for Spanish newspaper *El País*.<sup>63</sup> He told PEN that his first instinct was to refuse to cut the relevant section because he thought he would lose credibility with Chinese readers who would wonder why in a comprehensive book about hunger, China’s experience is never mentioned. On the other hand, like Meyer, he thought Chinese readers are likely aware of how routine censorship is in their country so they would sense there was missing material but understand why it was not there. He also reflected on his experience with censorship in his own country, Argentina, noting in the *El País* column that “when we lived under a regime that censored, we knew it, and we knew why certain books—or newspapers, or films, or people—didn’t say certain things...and Chinese readers would understand that I hadn’t talked about [the Great Famine] so that I could talk about the rest.”<sup>64</sup> Caparrós said that while he is moving ahead with the censored Chinese version, he wants to be open about the process. “I don’t want to keep it in the dark, in the shadows,” he said.<sup>65</sup>

No hubo azares, no hubo una causa externa imprevisible incontrolable. La mayor hambruna de los tiempos modernos—o, más bien, la mayor hambruna que la historia registra—sucedió en un país en paz, sin catástrofes naturales ni accidentes climáticos que la dispararan. Fue el resultado increíble de una acumulación de errores y soberbias, la combinación de una política equivocada y la creencia en el relato que esa política hacía de sí misma.

En 1958 el presidente Mao Tse-Tung decidió que China debía dar su Gran Salto hacia Adelante—que haría que su economía superara, dijo, a la de Gran Bretaña en una década. Para eso tenía que industrializarse—y millones de campesinos debían hacerse obreros. La agricultura, que era su sector más productivo, mantendría su rendimiento gracias a ciertos cambios políticos y técnicos.

Millones de personas se pusieron en marcha. La tierra, puesta en común, debía ser trabajada por comunas campesinas tan mal improvisadas que no conseguían funcionar. Y las innovaciones podían ser delirantes: se impuso el uso de vidrios rotos como abono, se construyeron diques de tierra que se desmoronaban con las primeras aguas, se decidió poner a parir chanchitas apenas destetadas. La producción, por supuesto, disminuyó dramáticamente, pero las autoridades locales prefirieron disimularlo: para ocultar su fracaso y contentar a sus superiores, sus informes exageraban tres, cuatro, diez veces las cantidades conseguidas. Con lo cual los jefes centrales se convencieron de que tenían razón, el Salto funcionaba: lo gritaron a los cuatro vientos, ordenaron que se enviara gran parte de esas cosechas—falsas—a los silos de las ciudades, disminuyeron las importaciones de alimentos y duplicaron las exportaciones de granos—que, según sus cifras, sobaban. En esos días, el presidente Mao visitó una comuna campesina y, ante la promesa de una gran cosecha, les recomendó: “Planten un poco menos y trabajen medio día. Usen el otro medio para cultivarse: estudien ciencias, hagan actividades recreativas, organicen una universidad.”

La confusión reinaba: aun mandando a las ciudades todo lo que tenían, las comunas no podían cumplir con las cuotas que sus propias mentiras habían ayudado a establecer; muchos de sus responsables fueron acusados de traición y ejecutados por obstruir el proceso revolucionario. Y en los pueblos no quedaba nada. Los campesinos eran obligados a comer en cocinas comunitarias que carecían de casi todo. Cuando algunos jefes locales empezaron a reclamar alimentos, los líderes del partido denunciaron una conspiración de la derecha—que quizás incluso creían cierta—y ejecutaron a los más insistentes. Mientras tanto, millones de personas se iban quedando sin comida.

Excerpt from Martín Caparrós' book *El Hambre* discussing China's Great Famine that will be cut from the Chinese translation.

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# HOW BIG A PROBLEM?

Because the censorship process is not centralized and is carried out preemptively by thousands of individual publishers, it is unclear what percentage of imported books are being censored or banned in China. Publishers do not advertise or report their censoring. In 2009, the *Wall Street Journal* cited a vice minister in charge of the publishing industry, Wu Shulin, who stated that 600 books out of the 275,000 published in 2008 were blocked entirely from distribution because they contained unacceptable content.<sup>66</sup> Wu said the offending material involved calls for regional or ethnic independence, subversion, or incitement to war.

Literary agents who shepherd foreign titles through the Chinese publishing process see these issues arise first-hand but have not collected statistics. Jackie Huang, an agent in Beijing with Andrew Nurnberg Associates, says her agency sells the rights to about 1,000 foreign titles a year to Chinese publishers. “Very, very few titles” encounter the need for censorship, she wrote in an email, but said she was unable to give specific numbers or a percentage.<sup>67</sup> The ones that do have problems are those that have “extremely sensitive words” such as references to Falun Gong, the banned spiritual group. Tan of the Grayhawk Agency also said it appears that only a small minority of books are censored. “The ones that would be troublesome never would have gone through the publishing process and publishers wouldn’t acquire rights in the first place,” he said.<sup>68</sup> While impossible to quantify, the number of examples of censorship encountered in the research for this report suggests that cuts may be more prevalent than these agents suggest, or realize themselves.

## An Enormous Market

China’s growing spending power and its large educated, urban population mean that it has become a more important player in the international publishing world. Hachette sells about 20 to 30 books a year to Chinese publishers, accounting for just over three percent of its total sales globally. But these deals have become more lucrative. Hachette’s Nancy Wiese said advances in China have “increased gradually over the last five years and are generally between \$2,000 and \$8,500.” She explained further that some health, psychology, or business titles can “see advances of \$10,000 or more” and major business titles and *New York Times* bestsellers can command six-figure advances for publication in China.<sup>69</sup>

Royalty payments also vary widely but are being paid more consistently and reaching higher peaks. The *Huaxi Metropolitan Daily*, a paper published in Sichuan Province’s capital of Chengdu, keeps a running list of China’s top-earning foreign authors. According to the latest list, British author JK Rowling remained the top overseas earner in China with \$2.41 million in royalties in 2012.<sup>70</sup> Other high-earning titles on the list include *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez, which brought in \$964,800, and *Steve Jobs*, the Apple founder’s biography by Walter Isaacson, which earned \$804,000 in 2012.<sup>71</sup>

Six-figure checks remain extremely rare, but China is importing a more diverse catalog of books, meaning that more authors are gaining an audience there. Raffaella De Angelis, a London-based agent for William Morris Endeavor (WME), said she believes China reached a tipping point in terms of appetite for foreign literature three years ago when she signed a multi-book deal in China for the Canadian author Alice Munro, who has since won the Nobel Prize for Literature.<sup>72</sup> WME has also inked deals in China for *Lean In* by Sheryl Sandberg, the chief operating officer of Facebook, and *Bomb* by the American science writer Mary Roach. “There’s a lot that can be sold in China right now,” De Angelis said. “More than in Japan and more than in many other Asian countries.” The rising Chinese interest in foreign books, she said, “makes our clients very happy of course,” she said. “It’s flattering.”<sup>73</sup>

Paul O’Halloran oversees international and domestic subsidiary rights licensing for the Gallery Publishing Group and the Scribner Publishing Group of Simon & Schuster Inc. He told PEN via email that the company’s China business is “fairly modest in the grand scheme,” accounting for fewer than ten percent of the company’s foreign rights transactions on the adult side. Over the last ten years or so there has been a boom in China with lots of foreign books being licensed. While the rush had slowed somewhat, O’Halloran wrote: “China remains an enormous market, and publishers still buy.”<sup>74</sup>

China is also increasingly on the radar of small publishing houses, who are coming to consider foreign rights sales there as a source of extra income. John Oakes, co-founder of OR Books in New York, said that five or ten years ago, he never would have thought of selling book rights to China. “These days, it’s absolutely a factor,” he said. OR Books does around 100 deals per year licensing foreign rights for the 15 to 20 books it publishes annually. About ten percent of the deals are with China. “For a little tiny company like ours, it’s significant and it’s growing,” said Oakes.<sup>75</sup>

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# PERSPECTIVES FROM CHINESE WRITERS

*For mainland Chinese writers, censorship is a pervasive fact of life and they must function in a system from which they cannot opt out—and challenging that system carries great personal risk.*

In addition to interviews with foreign authors, agents, and publishers, PEN spoke to many Chinese writers living in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and abroad. Views on what foreign writers should do if asked to accept changes or cuts to the Chinese translation of their work varied.

For mainland Chinese writers, censorship is a pervasive fact of life and they must function in a system from which they cannot opt out—and challenging that system carries great personal risk. The Beijing-based Tibetan dissident poet and writer Tsering Woeser told PEN that the greatest danger with censorship is the deletion of history or the perpetuation of false histories. “The writer accepts the castration of his or her work by cooperating with the authoritarian propaganda machine and the censoring system of an autocratic regime,” she said. “No matter how willingly or unwillingly you accept it, once you accept it, it becomes self-censorship.” Woeser’s own books are banned in China and because of her writing, she has lost her job, government housing, and insurance. She has also been denied a passport. “Except for being jailed, I have been deprived of everything that can be taken away from me.”<sup>76</sup>

Yu Jie, a U.S.-based Chinese dissident writer, said foreign authors should resist Chinese censorship. “Freedom of speech is the most important thing,” Yu said.<sup>77</sup> Liao Yiwu, a Chinese author who lives in Germany, said foreign authors who allow their work to be censored in China risk becoming “tools of Communist Party propaganda.”<sup>78</sup> He argues that foreign

writers should let their books be pirated and circulated illegally with no ISBN, a method that would “ensure the book’s integrity, but would mean no royalties.” The lost revenue, Liao said, may “serve as a contribution to Chinese people’s freedom of speech.”<sup>79</sup>

Murong Xuecun, a popular Chinese novelist and a regular columnist for the *New York Times*, is more conflicted. He said whether or not to accept censorship is a hard choice for any writer to make and a choice with which he himself struggles. He has spoken out forcefully against China’s censorship regime, including in a 2013 “Open Letter to a Nameless Censor” published in the Chinese-language edition of the *New York Times*, in which he wrote:

“You censor articles and delete words. You treat literature as poison, free speech as a crime, and independent thinkers as your enemy. Thanks to your efforts, this great nation of 1.3 billion people does not have a single newspaper that can express objective views, nor a single TV station that broadcasts objective programs, or even the smallest space where people can speak freely.”<sup>80</sup>

He relies on royalties from Chinese publishers as his main source of income though seven of his eight books have been heavily censored. But he sees editorial compromises like his as a slippery slope. “If you can accept the deletion of a few words, you can accept deletion of a few sentences, and then many paragraphs,” he told PEN. “I also believe that this should be the writer’s choice. I have no right to lobby others to give up money in order to maintain a higher moral standard.”<sup>81</sup>

Other Chinese writers PEN spoke to emphasized the importance of getting works by foreign authors into the hands of eager mainland readers and said this should weigh into an author’s decision on whether to accept censorship. They also drew a distinction between censorship that would fundamentally alter the book’s meaning or literary merit and smaller cuts that are not essential to the book, arguing that the latter cuts are acceptable, but not the former. As one described:

“If the book is mainly about politics and economics, it’s a no-brainer that a censored version will be a far cry from its original meaning, therefore not acceptable. But if it’s not, such as profiles and some life stories of people, and the sensitive part is only a few word changes that are not essential to its message, then making it available to mainland readers could justify the compromise.”<sup>82</sup>

One writer compared Peter Hessler's and Evan Osnos' books to illustrate this point: "While relatively minor cuts will suffice in Hessler's case, Osnos' needs major surgery. I would agree Hessler should publish his books in Chinese despite some of the cuts, but Osnos is right to not have his latest book translated."<sup>83</sup>

Another writer offered a four-part test for authors weighing this decision, saying, "I think authors should consider accepting censorship provided that:

1. Censorship does not alter the existing overall opinion expressed in the book.
2. Censorship does not change the overall narrative and structure of the book as to significantly damage its literary merit.
3. Censorship does not smuggle in new material that the author does not wish to express, but the publisher may wish to.
4. Censorship is acknowledged in some way in the book, so that readers know it is not a 'full' version."<sup>84</sup>

Chinese writers also offered suggestions on how to engage thoughtfully with China's censorship regime at each stage of the process. One urged foreign writers and publishers to "stick to good publishing houses and editors, insist their publishers and editors use better translators, and if possible, find an outside expert to go through the Chinese translation." Writers who do not check the translation of their work "have themselves to blame too." He concluded:

"[J]ust push your editor and publishing house to do a better job for you. You will be surprised how far they can go if they really want to publish your work, both in quality and in cutting back on their in-house censorship—they know how to take calculated risks and avoid overkill in deciding what to delete."<sup>85</sup>

These recommendations were echoed by U.S. academic Joseph Esherick, who told PEN that writers should consider arranging their own translators, people they know and can trust, or at the very least hire someone to check the translation pre-publication. The first line of concern, he said, is to avoid having a translator "taking out sensitive things and not telling you about it." Secondly, he recommended working with an agent who knows China well. "Look for people who know the Chinese publishing scene and have personal contacts," he said.<sup>86</sup>

Another Chinese writer also emphasized the importance of trying to negotiate with the editor or publisher regarding proposed cuts, offering the following suggestions:

1. Negotiate with the press, stating that the passage in question is 'academic' or 'fictional,' that the publisher/translator may have misunderstood the context; that it means no offense; that the wording can be understood differently.

2. Offer to tone down the wording provided it does not affect the overall narrative. Most censorship will be quite subtle, for example, changing 'the Soviet dictator Stalin' to 'Soviet leader Stalin.' In my opinion, the benefit outweighs the loss.
3. If the altered version does not meet either party's expectation, then offer to cut the passages with an in-line notice, i.e. three paragraphs or two sections are omitted or abridged here. Do not use the word 'deleted.' I've seen this numerous times, though mostly in Chinese books.
4. Ask the editor/translator to at least acknowledge the cut in the preface, the more specifically the better. It is not an unreasonable request, and most publishers should have no problem doing that with neutral wording.
5. Ask the editor/translator informally to help make the censored passages available in some way, somewhere, unofficially, online. Some sympathetic translators will actually help do this.
6. If possible, publish an unabridged edition in Taiwan or Hong Kong."<sup>87</sup>

The option of publishing in nearby Taiwan or Hong Kong is attractive because bookstores in those locations may have sections dedicated to books that couldn't be published in China or are banned in China, and mainland tourists often browse and shop those sections. However, many of these publishers have personal and business connections in mainland China, leaving them vulnerable to retribution. In May 2014, a court in southern China's Shenzhen Province sentenced Hong Kong publisher Yiu Man-tin to ten years in jail and fined him \$41,000 for allegedly smuggling industrial paint into China.<sup>88</sup> His supporters said that the conviction was punishment for editorial boundary-pushing by Yiu's company, Morning Bell Press. The company is known for publishing dissident writers' works and had been planning to release *Chinese Godfather Xi Jinping* by the exiled dissident writer Yu Jie.<sup>89</sup> Yiu's conviction is likely to have a chilling effect on Hong Kong's publishing industry. Chinese authorities are also cracking down on efforts to bring books purchased in Taiwan or Hong Kong back to the mainland.<sup>90</sup>

In addition to seeking out uncensored books in Taiwan or Hong Kong, Peng Lun of Shanghai 99 noted that enterprising mainland Chinese readers have at least three other ways to find forbidden books: They purchase overseas editions through online e-commerce sites such as Taobao.com (this is illegal but relatively common); they purchase pirated versions online or on the street; and finally they download scanned copies of books that are posted online by passionate readers.<sup>91</sup> While all of these methods are ad hoc and cannot guarantee a wide readership in China, their existence points to the resourcefulness of Chinese readers. If a faithful version is available, some people will seek it out.



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# RECOMMENDATIONS

**PEN rejects politically motivated government censorship and calls upon the Chinese government to ensure respect for freedom of expression by dismantling its system of pre-publication censorship and ending all reprisals against authors, editors, and publishers who are punished for exercising their right to freedom of speech.**

On the basis of this report's findings, PEN has identified a set of core principles that foreign authors, publishers, editors, and agents should take into consideration when preparing to publish in mainland China.

1. As a first step, authors should conduct a self-assessment of their work to determine if it contains content that the Chinese government is known to censor, including topics of political or cultural sensitivity.
2. For books that include content that could be considered sensitive, authors, publishers, editors, and agents should be on high alert for possible censorship of the translated edition, and should:
  - Ensure that the contract with the Chinese publisher includes an agreement that any and all cuts or alterations made to the text must be approved in advance by the author;
  - Negotiate with the publisher if any alterations to the text are proposed, to ensure that as much of the book's original content is retained as possible;
  - Engage an objective, expert third-party translator to vet the translated work—particularly any sections dealing with sensitive topics known to be censored—to ensure that no unauthorized alterations have been made.
3. If the author must decide whether to accept certain alterations to his or her work in order to move forward with publication in mainland China, the author should resist censorship that:
  - Fundamentally alters the overall arguments expressed in the book, or the book's narrative and structure;
  - Fundamentally diminishes the book's literary merit; or
  - Deletes or distorts references to major historical, political, and human rights concerns, including but not limited to:
    - The “Three Ts”: Tiananmen, Tibet, and Taiwan
    - Ethnic and religious minorities
    - Portrayals of past or present Party leaders and history
    - Discussion of political dissidents and human rights defenders.
4. If choosing to accept certain cuts or changes to the book, the author should:
  - Insist that the Chinese edition include a prefatory note indicating that the book has been altered or abridged, and, if possible, include notes where each of the cuts or changes have been made in the text;
  - Ensure that the censored content is made available in some other form, such as posting the deleted sections online in English and Chinese, as well as pursuing an uncensored publication in Hong Kong or Taiwan if possible;
  - Draw attention to the censorship on the book's webpage, the publisher's internet sites and in publication-related publicity so that Chinese censorship does not continue in silence;
  - Write about the experience: Consider composing an article, an op-ed, or a piece on one's own website describing the decision to agree to certain cuts or changes, to call further attention to China's censorship regime and give more information to mainland Chinese readers regarding the changes made to the text.

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