

Copyright agencies in Beijing, China^①

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Abstract Based on a study of copyright agencies in Beijing area, this paper reviews the historical development of the work of copyright agencies and their agents. It analyzes their business related problems that these copyright agencies and agents are facing today. This paper also proposes a few remedial measures that may usher this copyright industry into a more sustainable development and also with a more promising outlook.

Received Apr. 3, 2009
Accepted Apr. 7, 2009
Translated with a permission from *Journal of Academic Libraries* (in Chinese), 2008, 5: 98.

Keywords Copyright, Copyright agent, Agent system

Copyright agents are engaged in activities whereby a copyright agent receives a commission from an author or a publishing house for handling their copyrighted works in business negotiations for possible copyright transference and/or concessions and for royalty collection and other such related business. Copyright agencies first flourished in Europe and then in the United States of America. They performed a very important role in the promotion of intellectual property rights^[1]. Copyright agencies have always been seen as a necessary linkage of a matured business chain between the copyright industry and the publishing industry. It is a sign of maturity in the foreign trade market of copyrights. The ratio and the number of copyright agencies in the United States, Britain and China are 600:200:281. This ratio is not in appropriate proportional scale with Chinese demographic statistics and territories. It means that China's copyright business is still in its infant stage of development^[2]. The level of commercialization of market-oriented Chinese copyright industry directly affects the survival and thriving of these copyright agencies and their agents.

In China, the most active business activities of copyright agents are conducted in Beijing. For instance, Beijing International Book Fair has become an important annual event and locale for China's copyright trading activities. The state-owned copyright agencies, such as China Copyright Agency and Beijing Copyright Agency, play a very important role as intermediaries and brokers in doing copyright trading



CJLIS

Vol. 2 No. 1, May 2009
pp 77-88

National Science Library,
Chinese Academy of
Sciences

^① This work is supported by Beijing Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Sciences (Grant No. 06BaJG106).

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business. Most private copyright agencies and Chinese representatives of foreign publishers are located in Beijing. The very existence of these firms and their business operations in Beijing give them a competitive edge over those located in any other parts of China in terms of convenient access to abundant information resources, material resources and human talents.

This paper reviews the historical development of doing copyright business in Beijing. It also sums up the current situation and problems that the merchants in this field of business face. At the end of this paper, we also make a few suggestions vis-à-vis our overall thematic presentation. We hope that the work of copyright agencies in Beijing can soon be on the fast-track for more dynamic development and flourishing.

1 Copyright agencies in Beijing in retrospect

Since the beginning of the Great Reforms and the Opening up of China in 1978, copyright agencies in Beijing, generally speaking, have gone through three stages of development:

- The first phase (1978–1990). The first phase was a fermenting period of development for the copyright agencies. At this stage, the main features of the copyright agencies in Beijing were as follows: Chinese copyright agents spent more time in studying advanced experience of copyright agents and publishers of foreign countries and did little in actual business transactions of copyright delegating. The number of sales of copyrighted items outnumbered their copyright acquisitions. The number and size of operation of copyright agencies in Beijing were relatively small. Legal protections for such trade were left much to be desired. The first national copyright agency, that is, China Copyright Agency was established in 1988. From that time onward, a few relatively standard-bearing copyright agencies began to emerge in Beijing.
- The second phase (1990–2000). The second phase was a period of solid development of copyright agencies under the aegis of a series of newly created copyright laws. During this period, China promulgated the *Copyright Law of the People's Republic of China* (1991), *Protection Regulations of Computer Software* (1991) and *Regulations for the Implementation of the Copyright Law* (1991) and other laws and regulations. In addition, China also joined *Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works* in 1992 and *Universal Copyright Convention* in the same year. Parallel to the enactment of several copyright laws during this period, National Copyright Administration approved more than 20 copyright agencies engaged in dealing with copyright related business. Since 1992, the number of copyright acquisitions was greater than that of copyright concessions. Beijing International Book Fair (its first



expo event was held in 1986) has gradually become the prime domestic market for copyright trading and it also had an ever expanding impact on such trade ever since. At this stage, the main features of the copyright agencies in Beijing were as follows: 1) The legal system became gradually taking shape and was also in line with international practice; 2) the number of copyright acquisitions outnumbered copyright concessions; and 3) the number of copyright agencies began to increase and the Beijing International Book Fair became the primary venue for the national copyright transactions.

- The third phase (2001 to this date). The third phase saw a period of prosperous growth of copyright agencies. At this stage, the central government revised the *Copyright Law of the People's Republic of China* (2001), *Regulations for the Implementation of the Copyright Law* (2002), promulgated the *Collective Management of Copyright Ordinance* (2004), the *Dissemination of Information Networks Right Protection Ordinance* (2006), and has begun to place increased emphasis on placing various types of materials under copyright protection laws. In the meantime, publishers began to reengineer themselves from predominantly government controlled non-profit institutions to become business-oriented enterprises beginning in 2003. In adopting a business expansion strategy of "reaching out", copyright agencies became increasingly active in soliciting copyright delegations. However, the increased pressures from both domestic and foreign stakeholders were also mounting on those who were handling such business due to rampant and insurmountable problems of copyright piracy that was prevalent in China all over. In response to the societal needs, various types of specialization of copyright agencies also began to emerge. Business competition for delegating copyright transactions was to become increasingly fierce. During this period, the main features of the copyright agents of Beijing were as follows: Legislative work became more all-encompassing, and more attention was paid to copyright protection of different types of works. Copyright handling business became increasingly active, and the state-owned copyright agencies were in a difficult period.

2 The status of copyright agents in Beijing

By the end of 2002, the National Copyright Administration had authorized 28 copyright agencies. Among these copyright agencies, China TV Program Agency acted as an agent for TV programs, China Film Company of Import and Export. Beijing Tian Du Film Agency acted as an agent for films. The department of copyright of Jiu Zhou Audio-Visual Company acted as an agent for audio-visual products. The other 23 copyright agents were engaged in copyright trading of books^[3]. China Copyright Agency, Beijing Copyright Agency, China International Book Trading Corporation and other departments of copyright played an active and



pivotal role in Beijing. At the same time, with the business expansion of copyright agencies, some private copyright firms were also actively participating in this field of business. In addition, there was also a sizable group of representatives of foreign publishers' branch offices along with their Chinese staff stationed in Beijing, they were also active participants in this copyright business in Beijing. These domestic copyright agents together with those working at the state-owned copyright agencies constituted the main body of the copyright agents. A sketch of their development and operation is outlined as follows.

2.1 Horizontal expansion of the state-owned copyright agencies

With the publishing industry's steady refinement of its division of labor, it has developed into an irresistible trend that copyright business was to be delegated to the more proficient copyright agencies. In Beijing, among the state-owned copyright agencies, China Copyright Agency and Beijing Copyright Agency were the major representative ones. As the one and only national copyright agency, China Copyright Agency acted as an agent for more than 5,000 contracts of copyright business transactions since its establishment in 1988. China Copyright Agency signs more than 200 contracts each year at the present time. Each contract includes books of a variety of languages. China Copyright Agency is good at handling books in Russian. 90% of books in the Russian language on Chinese book market are brought in by China Copyright Agency. The company reached an agreement with the Russian Copyright Society as its sole agent for all of its membership's copyrighted books in China. Beijing Copyright Agency, the only public-traded company listed in the stock exchange, was established in 1998. Its major shareholders are Beijing Copyright Protection Association, the Beijing Broadcasting Station, Beijing TV and Beijing Cowan Information Technology Ltd. Beijing Copyright Agency has an agreement of "friendship cooperation" with the Beijing Broadcasting Station and Beijing TV^[4]. Beijing Copyright Agency acts as an agent of about 600 kinds of books, and is specialized in books of Korean language edition.

With the increasingly fierce market competitions, Beijing's state-owned copyright agencies began to expand their business scope and acted as copyright agents for many media varieties of publications. In addition to those state-owned copyright agencies specializing in movies, television, audio and video, software, etc. many other state-owned copyright agencies, which heretofore had a book-centered operation, now expanded their business scope to include also the media varieties. For instance, China Copyright Agency acted as a copyright agent for a number of television programs and film programs. Beijing Copyright Agency began to carry business of audio, video, electronic publications and products of game software, etc. In addition, through market mechanisms and administrative measures, the state-owned copyright agencies also handled copyright registration, pay remuneration for



the use of copyright and other legal and financial services of copyright related matters. Beijing Copyright Agency holds an annual conference on copyright issues each year and also sponsors an annual personnel training session for copyright related business. It also organizes groups of people in the copyright field to participate in international book fairs. From the above mentioned activities, it can be easily noticed that the state-owned copyright agencies have expanded their business horizontally in recent years and have also build a sound foundation for further development.

2.2 Vertical development of private copyright agencies

With the strong influx of European and American culture, a number of European and American best-sellers, such as *“Rich Dad Poor Dad”*, *“Harry Potter”*, *“Who Moved My Cheese,”* *“The Da Vinci Code”* etc. created a popular sensation on the domestic book market of China and reflected the strong vitality of such imported books. So a number of private book dealers also set their eyes on this field. After a period of intense competitions, a few private firms outplayed the rest to have become the rising new stars of this business field. Such larger private firms include Readers, Huazhang, Zhengyuan, Chengcheng and Liangjin, etc. Most private agencies would prefer to take independent approaches to acquire their delegation status as an authorized copyright agent from the legitimate copyright owners. They would regard to acquire such a delegation status through a copyright brokerage firm only as a supplementary alternative of getting it. Generally speaking, there are three ways in obtaining the initial information about an imported book, that is, through online networks, through foreign publishers and/or through copyright agents. Those who are in the marketing business of copyrights are usually vigilant about any information related to the ranking list of the best sellers of books both at home and abroad at any time. They have a firm grasp of the trend of book markets on a world-wide basis. They keep close contact with foreign publishers and copyright agents by various modern communication devices such as via telephones, networking, and mail services, etc. Once either side should find out certain appropriate books suitable for business deals, they will negotiate the possible transference/concession of copyright of such items. At the same time, these marketing people will actively consult their domestic publishing houses to discuss the details about importation, registration, printing and distribution of these newly acquired copyrighted books^[5].

Because private copyright agencies are not eligible to apply for an International Standard Book Number (ISBN), which is necessary for publishing a book, they need to cooperate with a publishing house for such matter. Their general strategy is to solicit business for a certain copyrighted item by sending out first some newly published bibliographic information from foreign publishers to the targeted domestic



publishing houses. When a domestic publishing house is interested in their proposed business item, they will provide additional follow-up services such as contacting the copyright owner for possible right transfer or concession, translation, editing, design, production, and back-end publicity and distribution. That amounts to an international collaboration within the confines of the publishing industry. In general, the overall size of private copyright agencies is small. They realize that it is very difficult for them to survive if only relying on the traditional business of acting as a delegated copyright agent by itself. They would take on as many back-up services as possible in order to obtain greater revenue returns.

2.3 The focus on market cultivation with foreign copyright agencies

With China's expansion of her friendly relations with an ever increasing number of foreign countries, the volume of copyright related business has also gone up correspondingly. Types of copyright business involve subject fields as science, and technology, management, education, computers, humanities, social sciences and so on. Being optimistic about the Chinese book market, big foreign publishers opened their representative offices in China beginning in the mid 1990s. The representative offices are mainly engaged in copyright trading, the sales of original books, in the cooperation with Chinese publishing houses for co-publishing books and in getting informed about Chinese publishing markets. Table 1 is a chart showing the founding date and the staff size of the major representative offices of foreign publishers in China and their business activities.

Because foreign publishers cannot directly enter into the Chinese publishing market, the mission of these offices of foreign publishers is to carry out important copyright trade. DK Beijing representative office, which was set up in 1997, mainly engages in the copyright trade. The current export trading of books by DK to China is about 700–800 items. DK Beijing representative office has developed cooperative relations with a number of publishing houses of China. Pearson Education, the world's largest educational publishing group, established its Beijing representative office in 1999 to carry out copyright trade and co-publishing. The volume of its business revenue in China increased from one million U.S. dollars at the beginning of 1999 to 10 million U.S. dollars in 2004. The world's leading education, information and financial services institution, McGraw-Hill Education set up its Chinese representative office in 2000, its Chinese office authorized 500 book variety items to be published by publishing houses of China in 2003 alone. Wiley's Chinese representative office's copyright trading with publishing houses of China was more than 600 varieties in 2003. Those foreign companies specializing in international copyright business are directly engaged in copyright trade with relevant publishing houses of China. Andrew Nurnberg Associates International Ltd. (ANA) is the most important British copyright agency. Its Beijing office handles mainly copyright



Table 1 Chinese representative office of foreign publishers^[6]

Name of company or representative office	Time of setting up and the number of employees	Status in the world of the company	Business in China of the company
Bertelsmann Chinese representative office Dorling Kindersley	1995, more than 1,000 employees 1997	The world's leading media and entertainment company DK's encyclopedia and living books have earned a global reputation	Book clubs, online bookstores, chain bookstores etc. Copyright output, cooperate with the China's publishing sector, market research
Thomson Scientific Chinese representative office	August 1998	World-class academic information institution	The provision of academic journals, academic and other memoirs, such as SCI
Thomson Learning Chinese representative office	July 1999	America's second-largest publishing group in higher education	Copyright trading, cooperating with the People's Education Publishing House to publish <i>New targets in English</i>
Pearson Education Beijing representative office	1999, 22 employees	The world's largest educational publishing group	Copyright trading, selling of the original books, co-publishing
CCH China (Publishing Group Wolters Kluwer's CCH Publishing Company)	January 2000	The world's leading commercial and legal publishing company	Co-publishing, direct marketing model, information database of customers
McGraw-Hill Education Chinese representative office	January 2000	The world's top 500 enterprises, the international leader in education, information, and financial service providers	Co-publishing, copyright trading, the promotion of original book
Cambridge University Press Chinese representative office	March 2000	The oldest and largest education's academic press	Copyright trading, co-publishing of academic books
John Wiley & Sons (Asia) Pte Ltd Chinese representative office	November 2000	More than 200 years of history, one of the largest publishing company of the United States	Selling of 479 kinds of online academic journals, Copyright trading, selling of the original books
Andrew Nurnberg Associates International Ltd	2002	Britain's most important copyright agent	Copyright agent, selling of the original books
Swets information Service Beijing representative office	2002	Netherlands international journals agent	Acting as agent for more than 60,000 journals of publishing houses of the world
Shinwon Agency Beijing representative office	Early 2003, 4 employees	Korea's Veteran copyright agent	Copyright trading, promotion of the best-selling books of Korea
Benesse Corporation Beijing representative office	July 2004	Japan's largest private education company	Remote correspondence education, foreign language education, market research, promotion of membership
Macmillan Limited Chinese representative office	October 2004	One of the world's largest and most famous publishers	Academic book publishing and direct marketing, the introduction of the original materials



trading and the sale of original books. Shinwon Agency is a veteran copyright agent of Korea. Its Beijing office has set up a cooperative relationship with more than 40 publishing houses of China and mainly acts as an agent for copyrighted television books, comic books, children's books and so on. The best-seller "*That kid is so handsome*" was first introduced to China by Shinwon Agency Beijing office^[7].

The current activities of these foreign publishing agencies are primarily to cultivate the Chinese book and copyright delegating markets in order to lay the foundation for potentially future large-scale copyright trading and co-publishing with Chinese publishing houses.

3 The problems of copyright agencies in Beijing

Even though the business of copyright agencies has made great progress in Beijing, some operational deficiencies still exist as compared to those sophisticated operations of copyright agencies in Europe, the United States and a few other developed countries. Their business constraints include but not limited to the following.

3.1 A critical issue of struggling for survival in an underdeveloped copyright market

As far as copyright trading is concerned, such prohibitive elements as the immature market limited operating capacity and the uncertainty about the scope of copyright authorization set restrictive barriers for the development of copyright agencies' business. Unlike Europe and the United States and some other developed countries, China's copyright delegating business is in a transitional stage where primarily a government-led operation is being transformed to a commercially market dominated operation. The market-oriented operational mechanism needs to be improved. In the meantime, many integrity related issues of publishing agencies need yet to be addressed and reassured. Uncertainties of decision-making prior to the signing of contracts and repeated breach of contracts after having signed and sealed those contracts are not uncommon. Authors and publishing houses often do not give clear and unambiguous perimeters of copyright authorization to copyright agencies. Publishing houses and copyright agencies also lack mutual trust, which often results in an unduly long and time-consuming process for the completion of an authorization of copyright delegation. Such terrible inefficiency greatly damages the integrity-based copyright business and also has a direct adverse impact on China's reputation and credibility in engaging in international copyright and book trade business. For the copyrighted items of trading, both of their varieties and quantities are limited. Besides, the net deficit of imbalance of the copyright trading is large and serious. The import of the copyrighted items into China is much more than China's exported copyrighted items. Such imbalance of trade of copyrighted items undermines the proper functions of China's copyright agencies. The reasons lie in two aspects: First,



type, quantity and quality of original works have not yet reached the international market requirements. Secondly, the current law enforcement about copyright violations is not strong enough to deal with the problems that it faces. Moreover, there is neither a strong public awareness nor a congenial environment for the advancement of copyright protection issues in the Chinese society. For the majority of authors and publishers, the copyright royalties are low and the publishing community does very little about it to improve the royalty situation and to foster, with added efforts, a more dynamic development of copyright legal protections. These unfavorable factors have damped Chinese copyright holders' enthusiasm for doing and publishing creative works. Such happening resulted in the general declination of quality, variety and operational inefficiency for those creative and artistic works so produced to enjoy normal copyright transactions^[8]. At present, there is no developed commercial service in existence to work as copyright delegating brokers/agents for authors or other types of current or potential copyright holders. Chinese publishing houses have not yet developed such a habitual practice in soliciting manuscripts from those agents who represent and work on behalf of certain targeted authors. As such, the business market of local copyright agents remain noticeably underdeveloped.

3.2 Deficiencies of the mechanism for copyright agent/agency protection

At present, setting up a copyright agency requires the passing of a joint review by both National Copyright Administration and Industrial and Commercial Administration. Its procedures are cumbersome. Copyright piracy is rampant and pertinent law enforcement is not strong enough to deal with it. There are no standard criteria for the accreditation of copyright agencies or of professional agents. The required qualifications and abilities of the staff at some of the copyright agencies vary greatly, which has a negative impact on the reputation of copyright agencies to a large extent. Currently, there are many copyright agencies that are operated under the aegis of public institutions either directly or indirectly. They lack proper entrepreneur motivations and the means of graceful exit if business fails. Deficiencies in the mechanism of copyright protection seriously restrict the development of domestic copyright agencies and the quality of professional copyright agents.

3.3 Low profits and personnel shortage of copyright agencies in China

Copyright agencies of China are in the formative stage of development. It is not easy for them to maintain a balance sheet between revenues and operational expenditures. At the same time, severe staff shortage and frequent staff turnover seriously jeopardize the sound development of copyright industry. For example, China Copyright Agency is a national copyright agency and it has a staff of only 8 people. The staff at Beijing Copyright Agency consists of 12 people and it is



the largest agency among all copyright agencies in Beijing. In addition, aside of the problem of staff shortage in most of such copyright firms, the problem of staff turnover is also very serious. Compared to those work forces at more than 570 publishing houses, more than 200 electronic audio-visual publishing houses, more than 9,000 magazine agencies, more than 2,000 news agencies, hundreds of Web industries and other copyright-related industries nationwide, the feeble force at Chinese state-owned copyright agencies is just simply getting overwhelmed by their commissioned heavy tasks with enormous amount of responsibilities.

3.4 Disorderliness in the copyright business arena

On the one hand, China's standard-bearing copyright agencies have to face fierce competition from the more sophisticated foreign copyright agencies; on the other hand, they also have to face the guerrilla tactics from those privately owned copyright agencies. The domestic market of copyright delegating business is immature and underdeveloped. The royalty collection for copyright concessions is meager and the price competition among the copyright agencies is fierce. It goes without saying that the delegating business of copyright market is yet still in the midst of struggle trying hard to find its way to a brighter day.

4 A few suggestions for restructuring copyright agencies in Beijing

In light of those problems that copyright agencies are facing today in terms of conducting their legitimate copyright delegating business in Beijing, the following measures are recommended to those who may have a genuine concern about those thorny issues these authors presented above.

4.1 Proactive government support to the copyright delegating industry, especially in such areas as formulating pertinent laws, policies and providing administrative and financial support

First of all, the copyright delegating industry is essentially based on copyright laws for its business operation. It requires a sound legal system that is responsive to the change of times^[9]. Secondly, it is necessary to alter the functional role of the government. Under market economy conditions, the operational strategy for copyright delegating industry should be regulated from a macro perspective from the government's overall economic planning, whereas in micro business dealings, it should be operated under the rules of a market-oriented economic policy. The government should loosen its tight control on state-owned copyright agencies and to allow them to have more autonomy and flexibility. Thirdly, more public and private investment should be made into this industry, financing channels for such purposes should be broadened. In addition, a statistical system and a statistical indicator system for the copyright delegating industry should be set up quickly.



Beijing's copyright delegating industry is in a period of development, the government should allocate funds to foster their development and to encourage copyright agencies to raise funds in different ways and to explore all feasible financing channels so as to facilitate such undertakings. At the same time, statistical system and statistical indicator system of copyright delegating industry should be set up to guide that industry to develop in a sound manner.

4.2 Advancing the “reaching out” strategy for the rapid development of copyright delegating industry

First of all, copyright delegating market should be nurtured and professional copyright agents should be established so as to let authors and publishers recognize the importance of copyright agencies. Secondly, the pace of reforms of publishing agencies should be accelerated. With domestic and international copyright market in mind, China's publishing houses should step up their “reaching out” efforts to a new vista of business opportunities. When the conditions are ripe, cross-media, cross-discipline and cross-international boundary media group should be established to carry out the operation of copyright delegating industry at the international level. Efficient and professional copyright agencies should be established to foster copyright delegating market. Thirdly, the copyright agents should study the way how foreign book publishers/dealers recommend their books to us; we should emulate their best practices to promote likewise our books abroad. Fourthly, it is desirable to sever the current administrative ties between a copyright agency and its mother institution of copyright authorization. It should have a separate and independent board of governors to manage finance. This restructuring of copyright agencies will make them to become autonomous entities in a highly competitive market situation. Thus, this organizational restructuring will remove some of the drawbacks of current copyright delegating practice^[10].

4.3 Establishing an occupational certification system for copyright practitioners

Copyright agents play an important role as an intermediary for copyright trading. The qualifications required for such professionals should be established in unambiguous terms. They should have adequate knowledge in copyright related business operations including but not limited to the ability of overseeing the best use of financial resources. Setting up such a certification system will effectively address the issue of current uneven service quality of copyright agents.

4.4 The desirability of establishing a professional association of copyright agents for healthy competition and for professional development

Healthy competition can promote the development of a given industry; vicious competition will increase the cost of inputs, thus result in losing out not only the



investment of a given party but also the competitiveness of the entire industry. In view of the current cut-throat competition by knocking down one another's price of service in soliciting copyright delegation, especially in the area of soliciting foreign copyrighted items. It is absolutely necessary to establish a national association of copyright agents to mediate and to foster the sound and fair practice among its membership in accordance with its established guidelines. It is with high hope that our suggestions will result in decisive and coordinated actions by the pertinent leadership in the government and also those in the copyright industry as well.

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(Copy editor: Ms. Jing CAO; Language revision: Prof. Charles C. YEN)

