

Opening Seoul International Book Fair 2010

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Your Excellencies, Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism,
Madame the Ambassador of France to Korea,
President of the Korean Publishers Association and vice-president of IPA,
Dear colleagues and friends in the book trade,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much indeed for inviting the International Publishers Association again to Korea for the opening of this Seoul Book Fair 2010. It is a pleasure to be here again. As you know KPA and IPA organised two years ago so successfully IPA's World Publishing Symposium 2008 here in Seoul.

It is good to be back, to meet so many Korean publishers, and since France is the Guest of Honour, many colleagues from France as well!

Publishers and International Book Fairs

Book Fairs are almost as old as the publishing industry and from the beginning international.

Book printers, who were at the time also publishers and booksellers, would swap extra copies in order to be able to offer their customers more variety. Even the emergence of publishing in national languages didn't stop the international exchange. Nor did the development of copyright, which enabled the trade to sell and buy rights instead of physical copies.

Over the past ten years IPA has been following a large number of attempts to replace physical book fairs with virtual trading platforms. They have largely failed. Still, the essence of international book fairs has remained irreplaceable, even in a country as Korea, so well adapted and advanced in the digital age.

Actually, international book fairs are even stronger than ever. Their numbers have multiplied.

This is because the essence of the book fairs is human interaction and the interaction with books. Publishing is a people business. Trading rights may be based on copyright but copyright itself is merely a legal expression of a code of ethics, based on the respect for the author and creator, and a passion for books. Ultimately publishing is based on trust. Trust is a necessary condition for human interaction, relationships and business transactions.

Finally book fairs have been and still are the breeding ground for serendipity. Opportunity cannot be planned, but it is possible to create opportunity for opportunities. I have been to many book fairs and I have always returned with new ideas, new contacts and a different outlook on our business.

Learning from Korea

As said I have been to Korea and the Korean International Book Fair many times now. It is a place I enjoy, not just because of the friends I have made over the years.

There are many things that foreign publishers can learn from Korea:

- Korea has been a reliable and valued international publishing partner.
- It is one of the greatest purchasers of foreign rights.

This openness to the world (very different from its past, when we study Korea's history) , curiosity and willingness to learn from others is an important characteristic nowadays.

No doubt this has contributed to the fact that today Koreans lead international league tables that compare proficiency in English and this is indeed an asset for the next generation of readers in this country...

Korea appears to be far ahead in the adoption of digital media. Internet connectivity is second to none and this has led to a number of positive policies. With regards to VAT, Korea treats e-books and paper books the same. This visit I am also very keen to learn about the progress of digital migration in the field of education.

Wishes

This year the amount of exhibitors has grown again, which shows the importance of Seoul Book Fair in this region.

May I wish you all success, a strong business and a lot of fun, strengthening ties between people from all over the world, for the further enhancement and success of the book in any form or shape!

Thank you.

