



## Literacy – the third pillar of the IPA

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Thank you for that kind introduction.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's a great honour for me to be in Chengdu speaking to you on this very important date in the literary calendar.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, people around the world celebrate **UNESCO World Book and Copyright Day**, which is why I am so pleased to be able to talk to you today.

For me it's always a pleasure to talk to fellow book lovers, and this occasion is really special for me, because I am doing it today, in **China**.

I've been to China many times in my work with Elsevier, and I'm always glad of a chance to return.

I have enormous respect for Chinese culture.

And it's inspiring to be here today in **Chengdu**, which has a long and illustrious literary history, having produced some of China's most important writers, such as the 'Hanfu' masters **Sima Xiangru** and **Yang Xiong**; the poets **Li Bai** and **Su Shi**, and more recent writers, such as **Guo Moruo** and **Ba Jin**.

It is an honour for me to visit **Chengdu**, a city very much in the news in my home country the Netherlands, where the arrival of the Chengdu honorary citizens **Wu Wen and Xing Ya** was headline news. I am of course referring to the two giant pandas.

Also a great honour to visit **SWJTU** which contributes so significantly to the world of engineering with top notch research and with outstanding **engineers**. Some of this is reflected in book publications, e.g. on the design of high-speed railways, another outstanding achievement of Chinese engineering. Others is reflected in journal publications for instance in the area of Biotribology, under the impressive leadership of Prof. **Zhong-Rong Zhou** of SWJTU. Just to name two areas, while there are still so many other impressive fields to list.

Now, having started as the new president of the IPA on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January this year, I am very optimistic about the road ahead.

My vision for the IPA is of a **strategic** organization working **for** and **with** a strong, cohesive, engaged membership. We're building on our interactions with the UN agencies in Geneva, in particular the World Intellectual Property Organization and the UN Human Rights Council.

And, since I know that there are a number of library leaders here today, I'll tell you about our work with the library community.

Sometimes the relationship between publishers and libraries is wrongly characterized as adversarial.

The IPA actually has a very positive relationship with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

And this is important, because publishers fully recognize the vital role libraries play in developing reading culture and in supporting the wider book ecosystem.

The IPA and IFLA meet regularly to discuss areas of common interest, to cooperate and communicate on the different challenges faced by publishers and libraries.

For instance, on 8 September 2015 – International Literacy Day – the IPA and IFLA together called on UN member states to do more to promote literacy.

The joint statement underscored the power of libraries and publishers to help UN member states to reach their Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on literacy.

Part of the text reads:

*'The ability to read and to assimilate information is a basic skill everyone needs. Without it, most people will be condemned to live poorer, less fulfilled lives in a less cohesive and productive society.'*

*'But with it, every other skill is attainable. And as the world grows ever more digitized and networked, it will become even more important that every citizen is given the skills that literacy affords so that they can find gainful employment, increase personal skills, take part in social activity and participate politically.'*

I'd like to reaffirm that statement here today. We will continue to push the literacy agenda by working with IFLA and other partners, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO.

Which brings me neatly back to **World Book and Copyright Day**.

Millions of people around the world mark this day with festivities and activities to celebrate and promote literacy, books and the pleasure of reading.

What is less well known is that the inspiration for this celebration came in 1995 from the mind of one of my predecessors as president of the **International Publishers Association** – a Spanish publisher named **Pere Vicens**.

Pere's vision was to create a moment when literacy and reading could be brought to the front of people's minds for a day – wherever they were in the world.

The IPA already had a strong relationship with UNESCO even then – so it was a natural step for Pere to seek their support.

UNESCO had the international clout to make his idea a reality and mobilize governments around the world – which they did very efficiently in just 12 months.

And it's no accident that they chose the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April.

It was on this date in 1616 that a surprising number of literary figures from around the world either died – or were born.

**William Shakespeare** and the Spanish writers **Miguel de Cervantes** and **Inca Garcilaso de la Vega**, all died on the 23rd of April 1616.

And the French novelist **Maurice Druon**, Icelandic writer **Haldor K.Laxness**, Russian-American novelist **Vladimir Nabokov**, Catalanian writer **Josep Pla** and the Colombian writer and journalist **Manuel Mejía Vallejo** were **all born on 23 April**.

For more than two decades, the goals of World Book and Copyright Day have stayed the same: to encourage the world – and in particular young people – to discover the joy of reading, and to honour the contributions of those who have furthered our collective social and cultural progress through literature.

But the story doesn't end there.

A second IPA-led initiative – the **UNESCO World Book Capital** – was born out of the first, and is growing from strength to strength today.

Once again it was the creative mind of Pere Vicens that in 2000 thought of granting the honour of World Book Capital to a city, to enable it to spotlight books and reading for a whole year.

Since the outset, the IPA has been on the nominating committee, which helps UNESCO to select the most deserving candidate.

And when I say this programme is getting stronger, it's because from just two or three candidates per year in the early days, we received **19 last year** for the 2018 edition.

Madrid was the first UNESCO World Book Capital city, in 2001. This year it is Conakry, in Guinea, and in 2018 it will be Athens, in Greece.

These cities stage large-scale book fairs, public readings, celebrations and author talks, and huge numbers of children take part throughout the year.

The legacy of World Book Capital city is a lasting understanding of the beauty of books and the pivotal importance of literacy and education.

Perhaps we will see Chengdu bring home the honour one day.

So you can see how the IPA has played – and continues to play – a leading role in global initiatives to promote reading and book culture.

UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova once expressed the significance of World Book and Copyright Day by saying:

*"Books help weave humanity together as a single family, holding a past in common, a history and heritage, to craft a destiny that is shared, where all voices are heard in the great chorus of human aspiration."*

It's a sublime statement, and the message is clear: books are like glue, binding peoples together and immortalizing human commonalities.

Since it was founded in 1896, the International Publishers Association has been shaped by and committed to that principle.

And **our** message is equally clear: publishers are the engine that powers books and literacy – they're the most important link in the literacy chain.

From the moment our parents read to us for the first time, to the day we submit our PhD thesis, publishers are there, enabling us to cultivate our intellect and advance culturally.

Publishers are like a silent partner in the great venture of human knowledge.

And this is why the IPA works so hard to promote and protect them and the vital services they provide.

We do this by:

- lobbying for **robust copyright frameworks** and **freedom to publish protections**
- promoting and supporting **literacy** and **accessibility initiatives**
- and making the case for professional book and journal publishing everywhere

This is work we do with national governments, the United Nations and in other key decision-making forums, such as the European Union.

Here in China, the IPA enjoys a good relationship with the Publishers Association of China, which became a member in 2015.

This was an important step forward for the IPA, for the PAC is a powerful voice in world publishing today.

The addition of the PAC to the IPA family – along with publishers associations from several other countries – means the IPA now represents publishers that service around **5.6 billion people** worldwide – that's **75% of the world population**.

This means our members' collective voice today carries further and speaks for more publishers than ever before.

**We are proud to be entrusted with this role**, because the publishing business is an **exciting, pioneering** and **necessary** one – no matter where it's happening.

But, in reality, publishing is about **much more than just commerce**.

I see publishing as a **motor of human and social progress first** and a **commercial endeavour second**.

There is no *more* time-honoured and successful way of curating, expressing and preserving **ideas, stories, opinions, beliefs** and **facts**.

It's a process that enables the **education, information** and **entertainment** of billions of minds every day.

In terms of impact on the **human cultural journey, intellectual progress** and **international comprehension** – no other industry compares.

And China's part in this narrative goes way, way back.

It's well documented that the very origins of printing lie here in China, with fragments of floral silk prints from almost 2000 years ago.

This was adapted to paper – which was also a Chinese invention – with the earliest printed paper book dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> century Tang Dynasty.

Had printing not made its way around the world and evolved into a '**General Purpose Technology**' – as fundamental to our evolution as the domestication of animals and the invention of the wheel – there could have been **no knowledge economies, no science education** and **no financial credit systems**.

In other words, the world owes a big debt of gratitude to China for giving rise to printing and to publishing – a **craft** that evolved into a **trade** that grew into an **industry**.

But since those ancient times, Chinese publishing has boomed into a **\$10 billion concern** – second only to the United States in terms of market value.

In terms of **new titles**, China is the world leader: 470,000 in 2015, up from around 328,000 in 2010, compared to 338,000 in the US.

This success is built on healthy domestic sales driven by a huge, literate population that extols education and self-improvement.

Chinese publishers have done a great deal for this industry, exporting the Chinese story to the world and bringing other cultures to Chinese readers.

Chinese books today offer more choice of **genre**, **voice** and **subject matter** than at any time in the last 60 years.

Children's books have gone from strength to strength, educational publishing is in great shape and with 20 million English speakers emerging in China every year, rising demand for English language books is propelling imports from Anglophone markets.

And in terms of innovation, China's a world leader: take for instance the emergence of '**wangwen**' or 'online literature' – a uniquely Chinese phenomenon that's making young authors like **Zhang Wei** and **Li Jie** into overnight multimillionaires.

Ladies and gentlemen, Chinese publishing is nothing short of modern-day marvel built on a deep-rooted Chinese tradition of **education** and **reading**, **culture** and **literature**.

Long may it continue!

Thank you.