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Academic publishers bow to Chinese demands for censorship

***Junge Akademie* calls for defence of academic freedom and freedom of publishing**

In autumn 2017, it was revealed that renowned heavyweights among the academic publishing companies in Europe and the United States were increasingly receiving demands for censorship from the People's Republic of China. This practice continues to this day. The instructions from the Chinese censorship authorities were usually conveyed as lists of keywords and communicated indirectly via Chinese importing businesses. The main objective of the instructions was to prevent publications in academic journals and e-books on specific topics such as the Cultural Revolution, Taiwan and Tibet from being made accessible to Chinese readers.

The *Junge Akademie* regards these developments with utmost concern and calls on all academic publishers to stand up for the principles of the freedom of academia and publishing as well as academic integrity and quality, and to defend these principles as well as their authors and readers against any and every attempt at political control and other types of restriction issuing from the People's Republic of China or any other possible direction.

Following the demands for censorship, Cambridge University Press agreed to block access to about 300 scientific articles for Chinese readers, including, for example, pieces from *The China Quarterly*, one of the most renowned journals within Chinese studies. News of this censorship became public and led to widespread protest within the scientific community. In response, Cambridge University Press quickly backtracked, publishing an overview of the previously censored articles and restoring access to the articles on its Chinese website. According to journalistic research, *SpringerNature*, an even larger German academic publishing company, blocked access to around a thousand articles on its Chinese website and has stood by this decision. Colleagues in China have confirmed these restrictions on *SpringerNature's* offering. According to media reports, numerous other publishing houses have also been affected by the censorship regulations.

Opaque self-censorship is unacceptable

“At the *Junge Akademie*, we view the actions of the academic publishers as a new dimension in the discussion about the freedom of the press and the freedom of opinion,” states Anna Lisa Ahlers,

sinologist and political scientist at the University of Oslo and a member of the *Junge Akademie*. According to Ahlers, opaque self-censorship is not acceptable. “As scientists, we strongly criticize the publishers’ restriction of their offering.” Ahlers also notes that this restriction represents a type of discrimination against the readers in China, who are being denied full participation in the international academic system through this censorship. Considering that China is currently making a great effort to become a leader within the academic world, the publishing companies should not underestimate their own position in the struggle for freedom of the press and freedom of opinion.

Members of the *Junge Akademie* consistently speak out in a variety of formats about the importance of upholding academic freedom. At the moment, several members are creating a series of short films in which they explain the need for academic freedom in relation to their respective research fields, thereby also raising awareness about the topic outside of the academic world.

Further Reading

Ben Bland: Outcry as latest global publisher bows to China censors. Financial Times. 1st of November 2017.

<https://www.ft.com/content/2d195ffc-be2e-11e7-b8a3-38a6e068f464> (date of download: 29th of November 2017)

Ben Bland: China censorship drive splits leading academic publishers. Financial Times. 5th of November 2017.

<https://www.ft.com/content/b68b2f86-c072-11e7-b8a3-38a6e068f464> (date of download: 29th of November 2017)

Steffen Wurzel: Deutscher Wissenschaftsverlag zensiert Angebot. Deutschlandfunk. 14th of November 2017.

http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/china-deutscher-wissenschaftsverlag-zensiert-angebot.2907.de.html?dram:article_id=400598 (date of download: 8th of January 2018)

Ben Bland: Sage is latest publisher to warn of China censorship pressures. Financial Times. 21st of November 2017.

<https://www.ft.com/content/9610c574-ce85-11e7-b781-794ce08b24dc> (date of download: 29th of November 2017)

The *Junge Akademie* was founded in 2000 as first academy for the new academic generation worldwide. The members of the *Junge Akademie*, young academics and artists from German-speaking countries, are dedicated to interdisciplinary discourse and are active at the interfaces between academia and society. The *Junge Akademie* is supported by the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW) and the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina. The office is located in Berlin.

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