

9 April 2009

To: Ms Jill Irvine
Productivity Commission
Canberra

A submission to the Copyright Restrictions on Parallel Importation of Books Study

Dear Jill,

I have just become aware of the Productivity Commission's Study on the existing copyrights arrangements for Australian books. I have to say that I am alarmed and concerned.

What the Commission is proposing to the Government in regard to the limitation of copyright to the first twelve-month will not only devastate the income of Australian authors, more importantly, it will also diminish the capacity for publishers to invest in Australian writers and books. Effectively what you are proposing is to ask the Australian writers to trade away the protection of their works for reduced royalty income, and to vastly devalue their copyrights. And at the same time, our US and UK counterparts will continue to write books, safe in the knowledge that in their markets their copyright is acknowledged, protected and rightly so.

Book writing and publishing are such long and tenuous processes. My autobiography was first published in Australia in September 2003, but it took quite a few years to write and edit. My publisher had invested enormous amount of dedication, talents and resources during that time to enable the publication of my book. It then took another six years for the film project, which is based on my book, to come to fruition. If your proposed twelve-month copyright protection had been in place in 2003, I would seriously doubt that my book would have the enduring success not only domestically but also in the international markets, furthermore, it would adversely affect the chance of the film project.

Why tinker with existing copyright provisions? Do we really want the same fate of the Australian manufacture sector happen to the Australian publishing industry? Why would you want to place the Australian based publishers at a disadvantage to the major competing countries such as the US and UK? The Commission can't be serious about suggesting authors delay or not sell rights into overseas markets, a recommendation that is tantamount to recommending that we limit our potential income and put a handbrake on Australian exports.

I urge you to pay a closer attention to the loud opposition voices from the industry bodies, authors and booksellers and reconsider your proposal to the Government. It's puzzling to me as why you would consider such drastic measures that would certainly harm the Australian book publishing industry and the writers that have served Australian public so well.

Thanks for your consideration of my opinions.

Sincerely,

Li Cunxin
Author of Mao's Last Dancer