

DID NYT'S MANDARIN TRANSLATIONS CAUSE TROUBLE FOR APPLE?

In what was seen as capitulation to Chinese censorship and its own outsourcing interests, yesterday Apple announced it was removing the NYT app from its app store in China, in response to vague “local regulations.”

“For some time now the New York Times app has not been permitted to display content to most users in China and we have been informed that the app is in violation of local regulations,” Fred Sainz, an Apple spokesman, said of the Times apps. “As a result, the app must be taken down off the China App Store. When this situation changes, the App Store will once again offer the New York Times app for download in China.”

Deep in its story on the move, NYT tied the moment China first told Apple to remove the app – December 23 – to a story it would later publish on the subsidies Apple gets in association with the Foxconn iPhone factory in Zhengzhou and to a blog post on “a seven-and-a-half-minute phantasmagoria of the Communist Party’s nightmares of Western subversion.”

In the weeks leading up to the withdrawal of the Times apps, The Times was working on various articles related to the Chinese government. One of them, posted online on Dec. 29, revealed the billions of dollars in hidden perks and subsidies that the Chinese government provides to the world’s biggest iPhone factory. China is also one of Apple’s largest iPhone markets, though sales in that region have slowed.

On Dec. 23, David Barboza, a Times reporter, spoke with members of Apple’s

media team about the article. Mr. Barboza had previously been in touch with the iPhone factory owner, Foxconn. He had also contacted the Chinese government as part of his reporting.

Later that day, a separate team from Apple informed The Times that the apps would be removed, Ms. Murphy said.

In another article, published on Dec. 22 as a post on its Sinosphere blog, The Times described an anti-Western internet video that had been widely promoted by Chinese public security offices.

Both of those stories were translated into Mandarin.

Chinese Propaganda Video Warns of West's 'Devilish Claws'

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Indeed, the more substantive of the two stories – on the Foxconn subsidies – linked to a series of other NYT articles, a number of which were also translated into Mandarin:

- Apple Services Shut Down in China in Startling About-Face (translated)
- When Trump Meets Tech Leaders, Jobs Will Be on the Agenda (not translated)
- Trump's Tough Trade Talk Could Damage American Factories (not translated, but focusing on a seating factory close to me)
- China's Internet Controls Will Get Stricter, to Dismay of Foreign Business

(translated)

- Apple Puts \$1 Billion in Didi, a Rival to Uber in China (translated)

Unsurprisingly, the article describing the move was also translated.

I've been tracking NYT's practice of translating select stories into Mandarin since 2015, when a story on what seemed to be retaliation for the OPM hack got translated into Mandarin. While the choice of which stories get translated can seem somewhat arbitrary (which is part of why I'm interested), many of the stories – especially the post on the video, which covers the equivalent of the anti-Russian fever we're engaging in here – seem focused on highlighting Chinese corruption or counter-propaganda/counter-intelligence efforts.

More recently, I noted that the NYT story on the DNC hack (which was very favorable to the DNC) got translated into Russian.

As the NYT story notes, Apple apps for other major US outlets have not been taken down. But the NYT one has.

As we discuss Apple's capitulation – and it is that – I want to renew my focus on NYT's decision-making process on what to translate to make more accessible to the citizens of other countries.