

A8 WORDS OF WISDOM

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Diversity important, says UN official

Rachel Yan

THE United Nations resolves to attach equal importance to its six official languages and to continue to foster language diversity, the UN assistant secretary-general said in Shanghai yesterday.

The UN has named this year as the "International Year of Languages" to enhance people's awareness of the need to protect languages, said Yohhanes Mengesha, assistant Secretary-General for UN General Assembly and Conference Management.

"The UN's language policy is clear, that is we respect multilingualism strictly," Mengesha said during the World Congress of the Federation Internationale des Traducteurs.

He said UN documents and conferences should be in the six official languages — English, French, Chinese, Spanish, Russian and Arabic — simultaneously. No encouragement or promotion of any single language is allowed.



Yohhanes Mengesha

"That makes translators and interpreters play a key role in the entire UN function," Mengesha said.

The UN now has more than 100 Chinese people working as translators and interpreters in New York, accounting for about one-sixth of the total at its headquarters.

To become a UN translator or interpreter, candidates must master two out of the six official languages besides his or her mother tongue.

Chinese natives should also master one active foreign language and another passive one to be qualified for the job.

The UN has launched this year's selection for translators and interpreters. Applicants need to accomplish two translation pieces along with the application form before being qualified to sit a written exam. Applications are due by September 8.

China highlights professionalism

Yan Zhen

THE Translators Association of China is planning to introduce a professional qualification system for translators and interpreters, TAC officials revealed yesterday at the World Congress of the Federation Internationale des Traducteurs in Shanghai yesterday.

The qualification will have three levels — assistant translators, translators and senior translators — so that employers can have a clear idea about the candidate's ability and make payments accordingly.

"We wish to have the country's translation industry properly supervised and therefore ensure it grows more healthily with the new system," said Guo Xiaoyong, deputy president of the TAC.

Candidates who wish to acquire the assistant-level or intermediate translator qualification will need to sit a national exam of translation and interpretation ability.

Senior qualification applicants will see their experience and existing translation work count together with a written exam.

The association has held exams for the assistant and intermediate level of translators since 2003. About 11,000 out of 61,000 applicants had passed the exam.

But it won't be until assessment of the first batch of senior level translators starts before the end of this year that the whole qualification system will be complete, TAC officials said.

For translation service institutes



Keynote speakers Marion Boers (left) from South Africa, Sabine Colombe from France and Adolfo Gentile from Australia exchange ideas for their lectures at the 18th FIT forum yesterday in Shanghai. — Wang Rongjiang

and companies, the association is also working to set up a threshold to streamline management and tighten quality control.

At the moment, no requirements are set for people to pick up a translation job, which gives rise to wide service quality gaps, according to Huang Youyi, the TAC secretary-general, who was re-elected as FIT vice president at the congress.

"People tend to believe that those who understand a foreign language can take

up translation job," Huang said.

"But in fact, foreign language literacy is only part of the criteria of a translator."

He added that a good translator needed to be equipped with deep understanding of cultural diversity and cross-cultural communication ability. "Otherwise, unqualified translators won't be able to interpret a problem clearly. On the contrary, they turn out to leave listeners with a bunch of questions."



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Translators aid understanding

Yan Zhen

TRANSLATORS and interpreters should not only be outstanding linguists but more importantly, they should respect diversity and promote cross-cultural understanding, experts said at a summit of international translators yesterday.

The remarks were made at the 2008 World Congress of the Federation Internationale des Traducteurs (FIT) which opened in Shanghai yesterday, the first time the global conference has been held in Asia.

Wu Jianmin, former Chinese ambassador to France and former president of the Chinese Foreign Affairs University, said in his keynote speech that the role of translators in bridging the cultural gap was vital.

"The scale of inter-cultural exchanges has never been so large in the history of mankind, while translators are indispensable in these exchanges," said Wu, who worked as an interpreter for Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and other Chinese leaders between 1959 and 1971.

The world, however, appeared to be dominated by Western culture in the past few centuries, he said. Lack of understanding for oriental culture made many people mistakenly consider the rise of China as a global threat, Wu said.

"Oriental culture is far from being understood by the West," Wu said at the opening ceremony, adding that translators were frontier workers who should respect other cultures and then promote cross-cultural communications.



Chinese diplomat Wu Jianmin (right) chats with Hannelore Lee-Jahnke, a delegate from Switzerland, at the World Congress of the Federation Internationale des Traducteurs which opened yesterday. — Wang Rongjiang

At the United Nations, where tens of thousands of language workers join hands to work on six different languages, translators and interpreters were hailed as silent partners in the diplomatic process, congress delegates said.

"Translation in the UN context is not so much a job but a vocation that presents a unique challenge," said Yohannes Mengesh, assistant secretary-general for the UN General Assembly and conference management.

For instance, translators and interpreters at the UN should demonstrate an

excellent command of three UN official languages, including English, French, Chinese, Russian, Spanish and Arabic, and avoid miscommunication.

Although translators are not supposed to be experts in issues discussed at conferences, they should be psychologically comfortable with playing a supporting role to help experts talk, the Ethiopian UN official said.

Delegates also discussed the qualification problems of translators and interpreters at a sub-forum yesterday afternoon.

The congress will end this Thursday.



Chinese literature promotes the culture

Rachel Yan

CHINA should make more effort in translating its literature to promote Chinese culture across the world, the former president of the International Federation of Translators said in Shanghai yesterday.

Technical translator Peter Krawutschke, who has just left the presidency of FIT, attached great importance to the role of literature translation in cultural exchanges.

"Unlike interpretation, which takes place in the moment, literature translations last for a long time," said Krawutschke, a professor with Western Michigan University in the United States.

"That's more helpful for other people to understand the culture and traditions of one country," he said.

For instance, German people knew a lot about France and the US because they could easily read works in German by French writer Moliere and American novelist Ernest Hemingway. However,



Peter Krawutschke

few Westerners could name the great books in Chinese literature, he said.

Krawutschke said the only book about China his mother used to read was *The Good Earth*, an English-language book written by American Pearl S. Buck.

"Those who don't understand a country's situation will certainly find blocks to cross-cultural communication, as people are always fearful about things they don't know," he told Shanghai Daily during FIT's World Congress.

Krawutschke, who speaks fluent German, English and French, suggested that China should take the first step by nominating Chinese translators to sit on FIT's literature committee, now dominated by European and American members.

Krawutschke said that it could take China about 200 years to fully promote its culture to the world.



The Professionals

Founded in Paris in 1953, FIT is an international federation of translators' associations in more than 60 countries and regions.

The non-political organization represents the interests of more than 60,000 translators on all five continents.

FIT has 12 subordinate committees and two regional centers in Europe and Latin America, with its secretariat based in Montreal, Canada.

FIT world congresses are held every three years, allowing translators the chance to discuss issues in formal workshops and informal discussions.

Meanwhile, the congress serves as the supreme governing body of the organization. Following election at the congress, a council and an executive committee assume a three-year mandate to administer the organization's business.

Translators explore diversity among world of languages

Yan Zhen

EXPECT to hear dozens of languages around Shanghai this week as nearly 1,500 translators gather for their four-day congress, which opens today.

This is the first global summit of translators to be held in Asia since the Federation Internationale des Traducteurs (FIT) world congress began in 1953.

"This is an important opportunity for the world to understand Chinese culture and the country's reform and opening-up achievements more directly," said Guo Xiaoyong, executive vice president of the Translators Association of China, which is organizing the congress.

Translators, interpreters, teachers and researchers from more than 70 countries and regions will explore the theme of translation and cultural diversity at the Shanghai International Convention Center. The meeting has set a record for the number of participants and nationalities at the past 17 congresses, organizers said.

This year, new members of the International Federation of Translators include China's Macau, Mongolia and Malaysia.

Huang Youyi, vice president of the FIT and secretary of the congress' organizing committee, said development in translation forge a close connection with a country's economic development.

"The more rapid economic development a country boasts, the more active the country's translation sector is," Huang said. "In this sense, it's quite natural to see the FIT congress step out of Europe and America to be held in China this time."

The congress logo, which embraces traditional Chinese culture and the theme of diversity, features a calligraphic Chinese character meaning "language" and two flowing red ribbons, symbolizing the role of translation in bridging cultures.

Besides the opening ceremony and keynote speeches, this year's congress will host 88 sub-forums with more than 1,500 theses submitted.

The 2008 China International Translation Industry Exhibition will also run at the Shanghai International Convention Center from today through Wednesday, showcasing the work of about 40 Chinese translation enterprises and institutes.

China and the FIT World Congress

• 1987

THE Translation Association of China attended the 11th FIT World Congress at Maastricht, the Netherlands, for the first time. The TAC was included as a FIT member in August 1987.

• 1990

THE 12th FIT World Congress was held in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, at which Ye Shuifu, acting president of TAC, was elected member of the FIT Council.

• 1996

THE 14th FIT World Congress was held in Melbourne, Australia. Lin Wusun, the Chinese delegation head and deputy president of the TAC, was elected member of the FIT Council and president of the developing country committee.

• 2005

THE 17th FIT World Congress was held in Tampere, Finland.

Huang Youyi, TAC's vice president and secretary-general, was re-elected as member of the FIT Council. His term as vice president ends this year.

China put forward the bid to hold FIT's world congress in 2004, later than the other competitor Argentina.

In his bid on August 3, 2005, Huang gave a brief introduction about the development of China's translation industry and the advancements in the host city Shanghai. Zhang Ciyun, vice head of Shanghai Municipal Government's Information Office and editor-in-chief of Shanghai Daily, answered delegates' questions during the bid's Q&A session.

"The more rapid economic development ... the more active the country's translation sector is."