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## Berlin publisher focuses on German books in Vietnamese

**At the recent International Book Fair in Hanoi, several German publishers and the Goethe Institute organized a stand with 800 titles. A small Berlin-based firm that focuses on books in Vietnamese was also there.**

Peter Knost is a proud man. He holds up the first two books published by Vipen Editors, a company he recently founded with his Vietnamese colleague The Dung. The two are not newcomers to the world of publishing. Peter Knost used to edit books for a Berlin-based group of authors from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and has worked as a sales representative for various publishing houses. The Dung is a writer with over half a dozen books on his list of publications.

The two men are excited about their latest project – books by German authors translated into Vietnamese.

"The first book is finished," Knost said. "It's the translation of 'Chronik der Wende,' almost a non-fiction classic about the collapse of East Germany. This book can now be read by Vietnamese speakers."

"Chronik der Wende" is a popular retrospective of the period between the GDR's 40th anniversary in early October 1989 and the free parliamentary elections in March 1990. The book describes all important events day by day and illustrates them with photographs from the time.

### **Vietnamese know little about German history**

But why should people in Vietnam read this book now, more than 20 years after the events took place? Author The Dung claims there is a need for such an introduction as most of his fellow Vietnamese know very little about contemporary German history.

"Very few people in Vietnam can really comprehend what happened in Germany with the fall of the wall. That is why I thought we should start our publishing business with this particular book."

Vipen Editors has also published a volume of essays by East German writer Christa Wolf, where she analyses the political events of 1989. Wolf is already known to intellectuals in Vietnam as the author of "Der geteilte Himmel" ("Divided Heaven"), a novella about the situation in the GDR, which was available in Vietnamese in the 1980s. Now readers will have the chance to follow up on her views about Germany.

### **Books need to be sold**

However, running a publishing house is not just a matter of translating and printing. Books also need to be sold. Currently, Vipen Editors can only circulate small numbers of their books in Vietnam. A few stores in the major cities import the books from Berlin.

As Peter Knost explains, they also want to target buyers closer to home: "We can't really reach the Vietnamese community via German book stores. Instead, we sell our books at events, public readings, libraries, and so on. Many Vietnamese corner shops that sell all kinds of things also have books on display."

Several German trade publishers already bring out books in languages such as Turkish, Arabic, or Russian. With their titles in Vietnamese, Vipen Editors is trying to fill a gap and hoping to turn it into a profitable business.

"If everything works out as planned over the next five years, we will have conquered and securely established our market niche."

But the men behind Vipen Editors know the most crucial aspect of their plan: To find ways to distribute larger numbers of their books not just at home, but in Vietnam.

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