China court orders Apple to pay in rights dispute

JOE McDONALD - AP Business Writer - Associated Press

A Chinese court has ordered Apple Inc. to pay 1.03 million yuan ($165,000) to eight Chinese writers and two companies who say unlicensed copies of their work were distributed through Apple's online store.

The Beijing No. 2 Intermediate People's Court ruled Thursday that Apple violated the writers' copyrights by allowing applications containing their work to be distributed through its App Store, according to an official who answered the phone at the court and said he was the judge in the case. He refused to give his name, as is common among Chinese officials.

The award was less than the 12 million yuan ($1.9 million) sought by the authors. The case grouped together eight lawsuits filed by them and their publishers.

An Apple spokeswoman, Carolyn Wu, said the company's managers "take copyright infringement complaints very seriously." She declined to say whether the company would appeal.

Unlicensed copying of books, music, software and other products is widespread in China despite repeated government promises to stamp out violations.

Apple's agreement with application developers requires them to confirm they have obtained rights to material distributed through the company's App Store.

"We're always updating our service to better assist content owners in protecting their rights," Wu said.

The Chinese writers said they saw applications containing unlicensed versions of their books last year.

In November, a court ordered Apple to pay 520,000 yuan ($84,000) to the Encyclopedia of China Publishing House for copyright infringement in a separate case. Apple is appealing, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

In the latest case, the Beijing court awarded 605,000 yuan ($97,500) to one company and 21,500 yuan ($3,450) to the second, according to the court official.

The biggest individual judgment went to writer Han Ailian, who was awarded 186,000 yuan ($30,000).

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